A BOY
of the
LOST
CRUSADE
By
AGNES DANFORTH HEWES
TENGGREN
'55

A BOY OF THE LOST CRUSADE

By Agnes Danforth Hewes

THE Crusade referred to is the Children's Crusade of the thirteenth century, one of the most dramatic and pitiful adventures of the Middle Ages. A little French boy, Roland Arnot, starts out with the ill-starred army of children to find his father, who, a few years before, had gone to fight the Saracens.

At Jaffa, he falls into the hands of a Syrian shepherd, learns to speak Arabic, and lives happily among the native people. At last he meets his father, joins the French army, and so ends his strange experiences in Palestine. The author has lived twelve years in Syria. Her book is accurate and vivid, and a permanent addition to juvenile literature.

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A BOY OF THE LOST CRUSADE

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A BOY OF THE LOST CRUSADE

BY

AGNES DANFORTH HEWES

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

GUSTAF TENGGREN

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TO

LAURENCE ILSLEY HEWES

HARRIET KESTER

PAUL KESTER

ILLUSTRATIONS

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A BOY OF THE LOST CRUSADE

CHAPTER ONE

Such a flowery little garden set between a fringe of woods and the silver crescent of river! Such neat, firm paths bordered with violets and mignonette; such a gayety of gillyflowers and snapdragon and proud delicate lilies, with a glory of a rosebush at the doorstep! For there was a doorstep, and a low, rambling house into which it led; a house that was neither grand nor poor, and was noticeable only for its air of belonging to the garden which held it.

As a matter of fact, Roland always thought of the garden as the most important part of the entire establishment, and so, apparently, did Robert Arnot, his father, and Rose, his mother, for they kept it, with the help of old Pierre, the gardener, with a charm of order that one seldom saw except on great estates. Beyond a doubt there was not a prettier or a better cared-for spot in the province of Lyonnaise.

When one must go indoors to bed or to take shelter from the weather, the rambling old house with its widespread roof did very well; but it was in the garden that one really lived, Roland would have told you, and, as living and playing had

meant the same thing to him in his ten years of life, he was right.

He was hardly out of babyhood when he would grasp his mother's plaits of bright hair and drive her around the flower-bordered paths, while she trotted before him like a well-behaved pony or broke into a mad gallop that made his short legs fly to keep up with her. Sometimes his father would lend a hand to rescue the runaway, his tall, straight father with the splendid shoulders and a shock of black hair that was always in his eyes. Out of an ambuscade of shrubs he would dash, put both driver and horse to wild rout through every turn of the garden, finally sweep them, breathless with laughter, into his arms and declare them both transgressors of law and order at the mercy of his leniency!

After the romp was over, he would draw Rose down beside him, lift Roland on his lap, and tell stories. And such stories as Robert Arnot could tell! Of fairies and goblins, of wars in far countries, of rousing adventures in their own loved France. Of all these tales there were two which ranked highest in Roland's favor. One was of that Roland of a far-away day whose gallant death made him the hero of song and story, and whose brave name he himself bore.

"See that you are worthy of it, little son," Robert Arnot would invariably end, "and never give up the fight even with all the odds against you."

And so it had come to be a part of the boy's very fiber, that one must go on in the face of defeat as though sure victory awaited.

The other tale directly concerned Rose Arnot.

Years ago, a pilgrim returning from far Palestine had stopped in the very house where Roland now lived. His mother's mother had lived there then. The man had given a spirited account of his experiences, and had ended by presenting to the mistress of the house the root of a plant which he had brought all the way from Palestine.

"Put it in rich soil and care for it," he had said, "and it will repay you with a blossom which every flower under heaven must hail as queen, so lovely beyond compare is it and of such a heavenly perfume!"

So the young woman had planted it beside the doorstep, and, when it bore its first miracle of fragrant pink satin petals, she declared that the pilgrim had not half praised it. There was nothing on earth to match it! Yes, one: her own tiny daughter! And she, as yet nameless, should be called after this exquisite foreign flower, Rose.

The plant was a huge thriving shrub now that filled the garden with the delight of its bloom and sweetness. As for the little Rose, she herself had grown and blossomed no less. "And it's a question for a magician to decide," Robert Arnot would tenderly end, "which is the fairer, the flower or the namesake"; and he would pull a rose

from the bush and hold it proudly to his wife's cheek.

Indeed, Roland hardly ever remembered his father without a rose somewhere about him, stuck jauntily at his belt, perhaps, but more often held caressingly in his hand.

Then, one day, into the midst of their sunshine and laughter had come, like a shadow, a strange story from across the sea. It seemed that the country of Palestine, where Christ had lived, was in grave danger. Even though this country was unthinkably far away, people had been making pilgrimages to it in the hope of gaining forgiveness of their sins in the name of the Holy One who had once lived there.

But now these journeys could no longer be made in peace or in safety, because a savage people called Saracens wanted Palestine for themselves and had determined to attack the pilgrims and to imprison and even to kill them. Now what sort of creatures these Saracens might be Roland could hardly imagine, but he had a mental picture of savages, half demon, half wild beast. Whatever they were, all Christians felt that they must be conquered so that the country of Christ, and especially the place of His burial, might belong to those who bore His name.

So, for a hundred years and more, war had been waged in Palestine for its possession. Expeditions had set out under the kings of France and of

other countries to take the Holy Land from the wicked infidels. But they had not yet succeeded; more soldiers were needed, and — this was the darkest of the dark shadow that had fallen over the sunshine and laughter — word had come now that Robert Arnot must go to join this war in the name of Christ and the Cross on which He had died.

A little later, he held Roland and Rose in his arms for a long time. "You'll take care of each other while I'm gone," he said — "until I come back," he added quickly. He had picked a rose, bent over it silently, kissed the boy and his mother, and so had gone quickly away down the road to join the Crusaders.

Everything suddenly seemed stilled, desolate, cold. Even the mother of the radiant eyes and hair was changed. Instead of rollicking games of hide and seek or mad races up and down the garden, she and Roland would sit for hours, arm in arm, thinking, talking, of the Crusades, of the Saracens, above all of his father. How had he fared during the long journey, how crossed the sea, in how many battles had he fought, what was he doing now?

So two years went by, when something happened, stranger than anything that had yet befallen Roland. It was a hot July day, and he and his mother were sitting in the shade of the rosebush, when they heard the sharp click of the gate and saw, striding up the path toward them, a most sin-

gular person. It was a monk whose shabby, dust-covered robe hardly hid the gaunt form under it; but in the wan face was a look that made the boy suddenly fling his arms around his mother, partly to protect her, partly to shield himself. For in the fiery eyes there was a relentless force that left room for no argument! Had they lured him off the edge of a precipice, still Roland felt that he would obey.

An instant the man stared at the two, then out shot a hairy arm that pointed a knotted finger at Roland.

"In the name of the Cross," he said in a deep monotone as if he were chanting — "In the name of the Cross and of Him who bled upon it, up and on, thou and the children of France! Up and on, to rescue the land of Mary's Holy Son."

"Children, do you say?" exclaimed Rose, startled out of her dazed silence. "What have children to do with that far country?"

"Silence!" ordered the man sternly, and Roland felt his neck and temples throb with rage that any one should dare speak so to his mother "Question *thou* not the will of God! Men have fought these hundred years to win the Land of the Cross, and still it remains the Saracens'! Victory shall come only by those who are of clean hands and a pure heart, those who are still sinless and fresh from the hands of the Creator. And such are children and none other."

Sinless! Well, he certainly was not that, Roland

thought with immense relief. Why, it was only yesterday that he had turned the lock of the garden house on Pierre just for the fun of hearing the old man fuss and fumble at the door. And last Sunday, concealed in the thick branches of the chestnut at the foot of the garden, had he not sprinkled twigs and old nests on the heads of the people going home from service, and hugged himself with delight at the spectacle of old Auguste's angry face and shiny bald head well showered with the litter? Ah, no, not sinless, he! Besides, he had no wish to go to the rescue of Palestine.

But the peremptory voice went on:

"As thou hopest for salvation, thou and every mother of France must send thy children to wrest from the infidel the Land of the Cross."

"But the boy's father is gone to the Crusades, and I have this, only this, left," Rose burst out, sobbing, terrified, and she strained Roland to her so that he gasped for breath. Yet for all her protecting arms he felt his ground lost and the monk's won.

"As thou hopest for salvation" — that threat again! — "thou must give thine *all* to the Cross! Not salvation of *thy* soul alone, woman, but of thy husband and thy child, and of thy country!" The gaunt form bent forward, the terrifying eyes fixed on Roland.

"As for thee, my son, listen: Seek you out Stephen of Cloyes. He is called of Heaven to lead

the children of France to the glorious conquest of Jerusalem. Seek him where he awaits you, and tarry not! In the name of the Cross!"

With a rapid gesture he made the holy sign on his face and breast and was gone as suddenly as he had come.

A day of misery had followed, and a night when Roland and his mother had clung sleepless to each other.

"'As thou hopest for salvation,'" he heard her moan over and over again. "Oh, Roland, my little, little son! To send thy tender body across the world, to hunger and thirst on the way, thy feet to be torn by cruel stones! Salvation of *my* soul — what is that if I must lose you?" Then, in a frightened whisper, the last words of the monk: "'Not salvation of *thy* soul alone, but of thy husband and thy child!'"

The next day old Pierre sought Rose out to tell her of certain disquieting rumors that he had heard. A strange monk, it seemed, had gone to every house in the village with the most extraordinary command, nothing less than that the children of France must go to the rescue of Palestine. The little place was aflame with excitement.

Roland and his mother had agreed to tell no one, not even Pierre, of the monk's visit to them, and they made no sign now that they had ever heard of the matter.

Some of the parents, Pierre went on, vowed that

their children should not stir a step from home on this wild expedition. There was no truth in it, they declared; but others held that there was something in what the monk had said of the failure of the Crusaders to win the Holy Land. It might be that innocent children would succeed where grown men had failed.

"And what do the children themselves say?" inquired Rose.

"That they were going all the same!" replied Pierre with a deprecatory shake of the head.

"But how are they going?" demanded Rose with a sudden vehemence. "Did the monk tell them *that?*"

Roland stared at the hot resentment in her voice.

"Oh," cried Pierre, "there's a lot of talk about that, too. He says that a shepherd lad by the name of Stephen has been called from the fields by voices and visions from Heaven to lead the children of France to capture Jerusalem!"

Rose nodded impatiently.

"They say," the old man continued, "that this thing is spreading all over the country, that the children are gathering at Vendôme, where the shepherd lad awaits them, and that from there he will lead them, as a general would an army, straight to Marseilles and the sea, where" — Pierre paused impressively — "the waters will part so that the children will cross to Palestine on dry land!"

Roland burst out with delight at the possibility

of such an adventure, but Rose shook her head unbelievingly: "To fill innocent ears with such tales!"

"A miracle will be wrought!" maintained Pierre stoutly. "That's what they all say, anyway."

All at once an intent look came into Rose's face. "Did you say, Pierre, that the children were going to Marseilles?"

"Marseilles, yes."

Rose made no reply, but she seemed to be turning something over in her mind, and, indeed, hardly spoke the rest of the day.

That night Roland fell into a restless, aching doze in which he could hear over and over her agonized whispers, " 'Salvation of thy husband and of thy child!' " By and by he was half conscious that they stopped, and he felt a blessed drowsiness relax his strained body. He seemed to float happily down a cool gray river that carried him away from trouble.

When he woke, he lay quiet for some moments. Sunshine filled his room and lay across him in a gay, warm caress. The vine that climbed the window threw a lacy shadow pattern on the wall. He stretched, yawned, and half raised himself, when suddenly he caught sight of some one at the end of the room that made him leap clean out of bed in sheer amazement. For who was it but his young uncle, his mother's twin brother, and the merriest, most mischievous fellow in the world! Then he

remembered that Uncle Jacques lived far away; in the north of France, in fact.

"Why, Uncle Jacques, how are you *here?*" he gasped.

For answer this gay and surprising young person burst into laughter, and with a leap and bound was upon him, tousling his mop of hair, pinching his cheeks and nose — and then Roland knew that it was not Uncle Jacques, but his own mother of the radiant laughter and the shining hair and eyes.

"What made you do it, mother?" he said, straining back from her arms to look at her. "Where did you get the clothes?"

"Don't you remember, darling, Uncle Jacques left them when he was here the last time? And why did I do it — ah! why did I, Roland? Listen, little son," and she drew him close to her. "It came to me in the night like a blessed vision that, if I could wear boys' clothes — just as I used to, sometimes, when I was a girl, and only my mother could tell which of us was the real Jacques — I could go with you to the Crusades as your big brother. For I couldn't let you go alone. No, not for all that terrible monk said. And, Roland, think!" — her voice fairly sang — "we are going to father!"

His father! After these two long years, across those many miles of land and sea! The joy of it took his breath away. Then came an anxious thought: "And mustn't any one know that you're my mother?"

"No, dearest, better not. You see only children are to go now, because the monk said that the Holy Land might be saved only by the sinless and innocent. I'm too grown-up!"

For a moment they both were silent, for each was thinking what if their secret were discovered and Roland must still go alone? Oh, how careful they must be to make no slip!

"I'll begin to call you Jacques right away."

"Yes, and I'll practice walking like him — so!" And Rose strode out into the middle of the room with a length of step that made the boy burst with laughter.

"We must start soon, too," he declared in a good deal of excitement, "for Pierre said the children were already gathering at Vendôme, and that's so far away."

"Oh, but we're not going there, darling," his mother explained hastily. "That would never do for us, alone as we are. No, I've thought it all out," she went on slowly, "and our best plan is to join them when they march near us on their way to Marseilles."

They took old Pierre at once into the secret. He was speechless with dismay at first; but he would not breathe it to a soul, not for all France, and Rose knew she could depend on his word. Tears streamed down his brown cheeks as he assured her that the garden should be tended as faithfully in her absence as though she were there,

her favorite yellow gillyflowers in particular, and the rosebush; yes, everything. He would air and sun the house, too. Indeed, the place would be all ready for them to step right into when they came back — when did she think that would be? the old man inquired anxiously. Ah! that Rose could not tell; a year, perhaps two; and she turned away with her eyes full of tears.

But almost instantly her gay courage returned.

"Come, heart of mine," she said to Roland, "we must pay our respects to Their Majesties." They always spoke of Roland's swans as "Their Majesties," for he had named them after the kings of Old France, Charlemagne, Pepin, Charles Martel. So the two went to the pond and threw bits of bread to the beautiful, eager birds, and then, arm in arm, they said a slow good-bye to their favorite paths, to the oak behind whose giant trunk they had played at hide and seek, and last of all to the merry brown brook where the cowslips grew.

Meanwhile, Pierre reported that several village children in the neighborhood had run away to join the Crusade at Vendôme. Then, one evening, "They've started on the way to Palestine!" he announced excitedly. "I heard it with my own ears from the Curé."

Rose questioned him carefully. There seemed to be no doubt that the march to Marseilles had begun, and village talk had it that it was now approaching Lyons.

"Lyons!" Rose cried out quickly, and a flame of color swept her face. "As near as that? We must be ready to join them!"

Two days later, in the gray of an August morning, Roland and his mother stepped out of the house to find Pierre waiting to give them his God-speed. A moment of good-bye to the sweet, dusky little garden, and they were out on the road that joined the highway to Lyons.

Rose, in the leather jerkin, her fair hair cut to the nape of her neck, would have passed anywhere for a beautiful youth of sixteen. Slung around her shoulders was a small bundle of clothing, and fastened inside her belt was all the coin that she owned. Roland carried enough food for the next few days. "And we can get milk and fruit at the farmhouses on the way," his mother said. When full daylight came, they were well out of their own neighborhood and, as it happened, not one familiar face did they meet along the road.

"We'll make straight for Lyons," Rose said, "and in two or three days we shall begin to hear news of the children."

But it was before that, in fact late that afternoon, on the outskirts of a little town, that a woman hailed them from her doorway: "Are you going to join the Holy Children? You're just in time!"

"Where are they?" Rose called back quickly.

"There!" with a gesture toward the town.

Just then a man came running down the road, a

blacksmith as one could see by his leather apron and huge bare arms.

"They're here, Suzanne!" he shouted excitedly to the woman in the doorway. "Four horses waiting to be shod, too! — I can see horses any day, but children — thirty thousand of them — going to cross the sea on dry land —" His voice died away as he ran on.

"Did you hear what he said, mother, *thirty thousand?*" whispered Roland.

"We were just in time, little son, weren't we? By to-morrow we should have missed them, and it wouldn't have been so easy to overtake them."

By this time the road was full of eager, hurrying groups intent on a first sight of the children. Some of the women carried jugs of milk and baskets of hot food to the little Crusaders, and they all talked as they ran along.

Presently an excited voice called out something that was taken up and passed from mouth to mouth. Instantly the crowd surged forward.

"What do they say?" demanded Rose of a man next her.

"That they are right ahead of us, camped in the fields outside the town."

At first Rose and Roland tried desperately to keep up with the rest, then Roland felt his mother's arm flung around him. "Take tight hold of me," she whispered to him, "like this, and we'll soon be out where we can see for ourselves." So, work-

ing their way in and out of the elbowing, jostling stream, they reached the side of the road.

"That's better," panted Rose. "Now, just to those trees, and we can stop for a breath."

"See," cried Roland, "where the fires are!"

Several hundred yards beyond them, something that looked like an immense shadow seemed to have settled onto the fields and to stretch away into the night. Here and there freshly lighted fires flared up from the gray expanse, and by their blaze one saw human figures, black against the bright relief. There was a smell of food in the air, and the subdued, persistent murmur of thousands of voices, like the hum of some mammoth hive.

All at once there floated out over the vast camp the old Church hymn, "Veni, Creator Spiritus." Roland, a little awed, crept close to Rose, and so, arms around each other, they sat until the last stately note had died away.

"We'll sleep here by ourselves to-night," she said at last, "and to-morrow morning will be time enough for us to join them." Then, as the boy stretched himself drowsily beside her, "It's good to be quiet and together, isn't it, little lad?"

CHAPTER TWO

THE next morning Roland, awake at the first bird call, sat up to see how the camp looked by daylight. It was no longer the gray blur of the night before, but a little world that swarmed with life and motion. Children everywhere, from those nearest him, in plain sight, to those farther away who looked like black dots and finally melted into a dark, shifting background; children by the hundred, by the thousand, such an array of them as he had never dreamed of, and could hardly grasp even now, under his eyes though they were.

Soon he noticed that the whole mass was shot with bits of scarlet, like a pattern woven with red figures. They were on the children's clothing, that much he made sure of; but what did they mean, these countless flecks of color?

"So taken up with staring that you haven't time to say good-morning!" bantered Rose in his ear, and she pulled his head down and tousled the fair hair till it stood on end.

"You were asleep and I didn't want to wake you!" he protested. "But, mother, see! What are those red dots?"

Rose scanned the great camp with puzzled eyes. All at once a light broke over her face.

"I know!" she cried, "I know now! They're

crosses, red crosses, to show that this is a Crusade. You'll be wearing one yourself presently, little lad!" She sprang up as she went on, "And we mustn't lose a moment, for if I'm not mistaken they're making ready to march."

She shouldered her bundle, and they struck out for the camp, munching their bread and cheese as they walked.

Presently they distinguished several black-robed figures moving about among the children.

"Monks!" announced Roland with a dismayed recollection of their fierce visitor.

"I suppose," said Rose thoughtfully, "that they take the place of the children's fathers and mothers — poor little things, they're so young and so alone!"

"Mother," Roland whispered excitedly, "that one sees us — he's coming to speak to us!"

The boy was right. One of the monks was hurrying toward them with as friendly a smile as one could wish. Rose squared her shoulders and lengthened her stride.

"Remember," she warned, "I'm *Jacques!*"

"Welcome, my children!" called the man heartily. "You are come to join us?"

"Yes," Rose answered, "we are here to become Crusaders."

"Crusaders to Palestine!" Roland made bold to add. Somehow it gave a thrill to the adventure to name their far goal!

"May Heaven grant you a glorious victory," the man said fervently, and went on at once to tell them they were just in time for the day's march. Then, touching the red cross on his right sleeve, he explained that it was the sacred pledge of the children and that when the Crusade had assembled at Vendôme each recruit had been provided with one. "But come with me, my sons," he said kindly, "and you shall each receive one even now at the hands of your leader, Stephen, himself."

To see this Stephen, who was the talk of all France, was exactly what Roland wished above everything. How would he look, the boy who had seen visions and heard voices calling to him from Heaven, and who was able to lead an army dry-shod over the floor of the sea? So, willingly enough, he pressed along between his mother and the monk through the ranks of children forming for the march.

All at once a ripple of excitement ran through the throng: "He's coming now! He's coming!"

The monk nodded: "Stephen comes to exhort his army."

As he spoke, the children gave way from side to side, and there rode into view, with a jingle of metal and a gleam of scarlet, a brilliant little cavalcade of youths who, with their spears and lances, might have passed for courtiers in some royal train. In their midst was a chariot fitted out with soft carpets and canopies, and on this

little wheeled throne sat the boy to whom every one's eyes were turned, the leader of the French children, Stephen, the shepherd lad of Cloyes.

For a moment Roland could hardly believe his eyes. He had expected to see a peasant lad, on foot, like his army. But here he was, royally at ease, and as far removed from his thousands of followers, with their shabby clothes and their bare dusty feet, as if he were the Dauphin!

It was on the tip of his tongue to ask Rose the meaning of such distinction when he saw the cavalcade halt, the mounted escort draw up on both sides of the chariot. The next moment Stephen rose. There was an instant silence among the children, and he began to speak.

Roland eyed him critically, saw that he was hardly older than himself, sturdy, and broad-shouldered and stolid-faced. When he raised his hands to ask Heaven's blessing, one saw that they were brown and coarsely made. But he was in earnest, no one could deny that, and, though a good deal of his language was obviously copied from his betters, a boyish phrase would slip in now and then, and an uncouth, energetic gesture, that gave his words an air of vigor.

God had led them thus far on their way to the Holy Land, said Stephen, and would continue so to guide them over sea as over land up to the very walls of Jerusalem, if they would only trust and persevere. Let them not fail the Land of the Cross

in her hour of need! Let them be loyal children of France and faithful soldiers of Christ!

"Dieu le volt!" he cried, both hands thrust high above his head. A murmur of assent ran through his huge audience. "Dieu le volt!" he repeated, "the cry of the first Crusaders, and now ours! Set yourselves to carry out the Divine will, and victory is assured you in this world, and glory in the life to come!"

A wave of wild enthusiasm swept over the little Crusaders. For several minutes one could hear nothing but cries of loyalty to the cause of the Cross and their leader, but Roland, glancing at his mother, saw that her eyes were full of tears.

In the midst of the tumult, Stephen raised his hand to command silence, and gave the word for the day's march to begin.

"Come, then," said the monk, to Roland and Rose, "we must make haste!" And the next moment he had shouldered them through the mounted escort and they stood, the three of them, before the chariot.

"Behold, two more Crusaders," he announced, smiling; and, as Stephen bent forward graciously, "but they yet lack the badge."

The boy instantly produced two crosses of red woolen cloth and fastened one in turn on Rose and Roland.

"Be ye faithful soldiers of Christ and his sacred emblem!" he said hurriedly, and nodded his dismissal.

Well, they were Crusaders at last, free to march now without question or comment! And, best of all, Rose's disguise had stood the test. The two stood back, partly to see the procession pass, partly to take their place at its rear, where they would be less crowded, and freer to talk together.

The long line put itself in motion. Stephen and his gayly mounted escort led the way, and after them followed the children, the thousands that had rallied from every corner of France. They were so young, after all, hardly one of them more than a dozen years at best, and with such a passion of purpose in their worn little faces, as they trudged along barefoot in the thick dust, as made Rose catch her breath in a quick sob. Some of them waved oriflammes, copies of the sacred Oriflamme of Saint Denys, and still others carried great wax candles and crosses. Every once in a while the black-robed figure of a monk loomed head and shoulders above the childish rank and file. Presently a cry sounded that was taken up all along the line. Louder and stronger it rose and swelled, until the air vibrated with the famous old battle-cry of the Crusaders, "Dieu le volt! Dieu le volt!" The great column was dwindling now, and its rear was in sight. Rose and Roland stepped forward, and fell at once into the marching pace.

It was a hot morning, breathlessly sultry. And the dust from those thousands of feet! At noon they stopped to rest and to eat, and again just be-

fore sunset; and each time Stephen spoke to them a good deal as he had in the morning. Sometimes a group of the army would start an old Church hymn and would be joined by others, or answered, perhaps, with a sacred marching song composed by one of the children. When they were not singing, they talked on the one subject that absorbed them all, the miracle that was to turn the sea back; and bring them, in the end, to Jerusalem!

"Do you believe that?" Roland whispered to Rose — "that the waves will part and let us pass over on dry land?"

"Not exactly," Rose answered doubtfully, "but some way will be found for us to get to Palestine, little son, I'm sure of that!"

This troublesome matter disposed of, they always went on to the topic that they never tired of, their own Crusader, and how their first meeting would come about and when and where.

Indeed, if it had not been for those precious bits of whispered confidences with his mother, the boy could hardly have kept up heart on the long march, for it seemed as if there had never been such a hot midsummer as this, and, to make matters worse, food was hard to find. When the Crusade passed through a village, there was a scramble for bread or fruit and milk, and, as long as the supplies lasted and one was quick of foot and of hand and didn't care how the younger and weaker children fared, one did very well. Roland under-

stood now how it was that so many of the faces around him showed hollow cheeks and hungry eyes. Yet even hunger would have been bearable if there had been plenty of water or if the sun had been more merciful.

"We can bear it a few days more, darling," his mother would encourage him. "It can't be long till we reach the sea."

As the days grew hotter and hotter, signs of a sullen restlessness began to spread through the army. They sang their hymns and songs less and less often. All that they could think of was water to quench their parched little throats, and shelter from the burning heat.

"When shall we reach Marseilles? How far are we now from the sea?" they asked over and over.

A great many declared they would turn back and go home; but only a few kept their threats; and, by dint of warnings and encouragement and fervent eloquence, Stephen and the faithful monks managed to keep the little Crusaders together and marching south.

One afternoon a rumor that the journey was over ran like wildfire through the army.

"Marseilles to-morrow!" was the cry on all sides.

In a minute the weary, lagging procession had become a mob alive to the finger-tips and crazed with joy. Order and discipline were thrown to the winds and Stephen's leadership forgotten. In the mad rush forward, it was every one for himself,

to keep up or fall behind according to his legs and breath.

Of all those eager, happy children Roland was the very happiest, for to him Marseilles meant not only Palestine, but his father. The only drawback was that for a whole day now his mother had been not in the least like her radiant self. Such a spirited lad she had looked in her boy's disguise, and how she had kept up her courage and his through heat and hunger and thirst! But now, with flushed face and drooping shoulders — for the life of him Roland couldn't help thinking of the roses in the garden at home when they wilted under too fierce a sun.

"I'll feel better presently, little son," she assured him; but late afternoon had come, and he, watching her with a terrible fear at his heart, knew that she was worse.

"I can't go any farther," she said at last, "my head is so dizzy and hot. We'll sleep here by the roadside, and to-morrow we can find our way to Marseilles."

The children were far beyond them now, and fast disappearing in the distance. As Roland glanced after the last hurrying group with a pang of lonely helplessness, he noticed in the fields to one side a substantial building, with barns and outhouses. The place looked solid and comfortable, and to the frightened boy it seemed to call the friendliest greeting he had ever heard.

"Not here, mother," he said quickly. "Look

over there!" Rose steadied herself on his shoulder while he pointed. "I know there's hay in those barns, and that'll be so much better than the hard ground, and you'll be well after a good night's sleep."

So he led the way across the fields, Rose by this time leaning heavily on him, when, just as they reached the nearest outhouse, an old man suddenly appeared in its doorway with an armful of fodder. For a moment he eyed them suspiciously in the gathering dusk, but, before he could speak, Roland bade him a good evening and begged for just the night's shelter on the hay.

"We belong to the Children's Crusade," he explained, "and my comrade here is tired with the march."

The man's face lighted up at once. "Children Crusaders!" he exclaimed. "I saw them pass just now! Yes, lie here if you want to," he went on; "not that I'm the Head of the Monastery to say yes or no" — he shrugged a shoulder toward the stone building — "but you need rest, and you can have it for all of me or the Brothers either."

It was only afterward that Roland remembered the man's mention of a monastery, for with the first permission he and Rose had turned in to the outhouse, and had lain down as they were on the soft sweet hay. Now that he came to realize it, his own head throbbed with pain, and to make matters even worse Rose seemed too ill to speak.

He bent over and looked into her face as she lay breathing hard.

"Lie down," she whispered, "close beside me."

And so, a little reassured, he fell fast asleep, his head pressed against her arm.

It must have been several hours later that he found himself sitting bolt upright with a feeling that some one was calling him, from far away.

"Roland, little son," he heard, with long, gasping pauses between the words, "go and find one of the Brothers. Tell him to come — oh, quickly!"

Why, it was his mother! His own mother, only that he would hardly have known this agonized whisper for the dear voice. "One of the Brothers" — what did she mean? Then all at once he remembered — the monastery and the Brothers that the old man had spoken of last night — and he was on his feet in a flash. Just long enough to press his face to hers, to whisper that he would be back before she knew he was gone, and he was stumbling along in the dark to bring her help, help that even he knew she needed as never before.

Just how he got to the large main building, Roland never knew. He remembered beating frantically with both fists at a door until it opened and a monk stood before him, with a lantern held up to the roundest, kindest face that he had ever seen. Somehow he made the man understand that his brother was ill, oh, so desperately ill, out there in a shed. Would the Brother come to him? Of

course he would come! And the voice was as kind as the rosy face.

"We'll lose no time, child. Show me the way to him."

They found Rose lying quietly, but she started up as the monk bent over her.

"Don't be afraid, my boy. I am Father Gaspard. So!" — as the light of his lantern fell on her scarlet cross — "you are one of the Holy Children!"

"Father," she whispered, "I can live only a few hours more. Pain like this ends only in one way." She stopped to draw Roland's fair little head closer, for, at sight of her changed face, he had flung himself down beside her.

"There is something I must tell you, Father, and something I must ask of you. First, I am Rose Arnot, not the child's brother, but his mother. Wait" — at the monk's startled cry — "let me speak while I can. I could not let the boy go alone to the Crusades — oh, if you could know how my heart was torn at the very thought of it! — and I could not have gone with him if it had been known that I was his mother, so I used this disguise."

There was another painful struggle for breath, then, "Very soon now he will be alone — alone!"

The boy would never forget the agony in her voice and her trembling effort to draw him closer as though she could not let him go.

Father Gaspard drew nearer, his crucifix raised, as if to lay it upon her lips.

"Wait" — Rose turned Roland's head so that he might face the monk. "Father, this is what I must ask of you: The boy's father has been in the Holy Land for two years. We were going with the Holy Children to find him."

Father Gaspard's face lighted eagerly as if to speak, but Rose continued:

"In the name of the Cross I have given everything, my husband, my child, even as I wish for the salvation of their souls. And as *you* hope for salvation, finish what I have begun; help my boy in the quest for his father! I ask much — but I have given my all — in the name of the Cross."

She lay back with her hand always between Roland's two little cold ones, while Father Gaspard bent over her with the kindest, most pitying face in the world:

"Sleep in peace, my child! I accept your charge, for I myself will take your boy to the Holy Land."

He held his crucifix to her lips while he repeated the prayer for the dying; then he stepped back to leave the two alone.

After some time Rose opened her eyes. "Roland, little son, bear your name worthily, never lose courage! And never stop looking for father; you will find him, heart of mine!"

"Not without you, mother! Oh, let me go — with you —" the boy sobbed, crazed with grief, his arms strained around her, his cheek on hers. "I won't let you go — I won't!"

And so Father Gaspard found him a little later, clinging to the still form; and with a world of tenderness he lifted the boy in his arms and carried him to his own room.

What happened afterward Roland never really knew. Sometimes he seemed to be fighting against great waves that tried to smother him; again the black water would close over his head and he would feel himself sink into its depths. Over and over it went on, his painful struggle against those cruel waves; then, one day, the darkness slipped suddenly away and he opened his eyes on the blessed light.

"Bravo!" he heard some one exclaim. "You have made a desperate fight, little lad, and you have won!" And over him bent, who in the world but Father Gaspard, with a smile as warm as the sunshine itself.

Instantly everything came back to the boy, every minute of those black hours that had struck out at a blow the light of his life. What did the sunshine matter to him, for all its warmth and gladness? What, indeed, did anything matter, now that his mother was gone? He wanted to be alone, to creep away where no one could see him, and he closed his eyes and turned toward the wall. The forest at home came to his mind. Oh, if he could lie down under its leaves and never wake up — if he only could!

"I know how it is, my child," Father Gaspard

whispered compassionately, "but hope will come to you, and strength; be sure of that."

As Roland looked into the kind face, a question rose to his lips, something that he wanted desperately to know, yet dreaded to ask.

"Where," he began hesitatingly, "where —" And for the life of him he could get no farther.

But Father Gaspard understood.

"In our own churchyard here, my child," he said gently, "she lies at peace. A cross with her name, Rose Arnot, marks her rest."

He waited a little, for, at the sound of the dear name, Roland had turned again to the wall.

"Now, my child," the friendly voice went on, "try to sleep, and to-morrow I'll tell you what we are going to do — you and I!"

The next day Father Gaspard began by saying that the Children's Crusade had left Marseilles for the Holy Land; not, to be sure, the army of many thousands with whom Roland had marched, for a great many of those had turned back to their homes when the sea refused to roll aside for them, but at least five thousand, enough to fill seven good-sized ships. For that was the way that at last opened to them, to cross the sea in ships. It had been a sight that all Marseilles had run to see, and rumors of it had come back even to the monastery.

So the Children's Crusade had gone, and with it Roland's chance to find his father! Father Gaspard, sensing the boy's dismay, went quickly

on. Another expedition, however, was to set out for Palestine, neither men-at-arms nor yet innocent children, but soldiers of the Cross, no less; in fact, monks and priests, perhaps twenty all told, of whom Father Gaspard, it seemed, was the head.

The whole Christian world, he explained to Roland, was alarmed at the losses of the Crusaders in the Holy Land. It might be that their ardor for the Cross had weakened, and that Heaven had sent defeat to punish them.

"At any rate," he continued earnestly, "we are going to take the message of the Church to our armies, to exhort them daily to keep faith with her and to set their feet straight in her paths, so that they may be strong to turn defeat into victory and to plant the banners of the Cross throughout Palestine."

So this was what he meant when he had assured Rose, "I myself will take the boy to the Holy Land!"

"And so, lad, even though your own Crusade has gone without you," Father Gaspard went on, "there's another for you, and a ship to boot! Yes," in answer to the boy's leaping color, "the Palestina has been chartered for us, and she lies in the harbor of Marseilles ready to sail" — here he paused impressively — "ready to sail," he repeated, his eyes dancing in gleeful, friendly challenge, "as soon as *you* are ready to be carried on board her!"

"To-morrow!" Roland flashed back. "To-day — now!" he added almost in the same breath, and for the first time he saw, through the blackness of his grief, the glimmer of the magic light that we call hope and that we are never too tired to follow up the hill and beyond!

"Thank God!" Father Gaspard whispered happily to himself. "The battle is won! The child *wants* to live!" But all he said aloud was, "If the flesh is as strong as the spirit, lad, depend upon it, it won't be long!"

Nor was it long, in fact, less than a week, on a day in late August, until Roland found himself propped in a sheltered corner of the Palestina's stern, with the preparation for departure thick around him. There had been an easy journey from the monastery to Marseilles when the monks, turn and turn about, had carried him in a litter along the country roads, then through the streets of the old seaport, with curious crowds following, down to the harbor itself, rippling, rollicking, jubilant in the sunlight.

It was just past noon now, the hour set for sailing. The noise and bustle began to subside. The ports through which the passengers had come on board were closed, and the captain was on his last round of inspection to make sure that everything was right and safe. He straightened up finally, quite satisfied, and nodded to Father Gaspard. Instantly the monk signaled his com-

panions about him, and, standing together, they sang the fine old hymn that by now Roland himself knew so well, "Veni, Creator Spiritus." The hymn ended, and there came a moment of silence when every one on board stood with bowed head.

Then a brisk word rang out from the captain, and the sailors set the sails which swelled at once to the wind. Another signal! Up came the anchor with a rattle and clank. The ship began to move, with a vague, uneasy motion; then, gathering headway, she drove smoothly forward, past boats big and little, through the harbor and beyond the rock that guards its entrance, the Rock of Notre Dame de la Garde, on whose top Roland, straining his head back, saw far, far above him the Chapel of the Sailors.

And so on into open waters! On into a sea of blue whose gold-tipped waves rollicked and raced forever outward to meet a sky that bent smiling to their salute. The Palestina was under way! Her long voyage to the country whose name she bore had begun!

From the very first it seemed as if everybody on board waited a chance to be of service to Roland in one way or another, and it gave him a sense of warm, happy security that went a long way toward healing his sore little heart. The Brothers, of course, felt that he was their special charge, and there was never a time that one of

them was not on the alert for his comfort or amusement. Then, when he was up on his feet, and ready to make little trips of exploration into whatever niche he could climb or wedge himself, it was the sailors who were his guides, as eager to explain as he to find out. They seemed to him like delightful, mischievous, grown-up boys, altogether irresistible with their tattooed arms and legs, their big gold earrings, their clothes that looked as if they had been collected piecemeal from every port of the world, and their jargon of a dozen tongues and dialects fitted together with vivid gestures of hand and head and shoulder.

Day after day of perfect sunshine and breeze went by, until every one declared that the unbroken run of fair weather must be due to Roland. After that he was hailed as the ship's mascot. "Heaven grant," said Father Gaspard, "that the same good fortune attends the other Children Crusaders."

Roland was never tired of Father Gaspard's company, for the monk was a learned man and knew how to put his wisdom to interesting ends. He would tell, by the hour, tales of the Crusades; of the exploits of Tancred and his knights; of the proud Baldwin who had been crowned a hundred years ago, Palestine's first Christian King. But, Father Gaspard would continue, the tide had turned in favor of the Saracens, things were going ill for the Crusaders now, and, instead of ruling Syria's

length and breadth, they were barely clinging to her seacoast.

Where could his father be, Roland wondered, with matters at such a dubious ebb? And the Children Crusaders? How would they go about their conquest of the Holy Land?

"It may be," Father Gaspard suggested, "we shall get word of them from a passing ship or at some port where we stop."

But, though they saw plenty of sails at a distance, and sometimes islands that thrust up from the water, bare and bold, the Palestina held steadily on her course. She must take advantage of every hour of good weather, the captain declared, for gales could be expected at any time now, and no delay was to be risked.

In spite of the captain's gruff ways, there was not a soul on the Palestina that could match either his fund of knowledge about winds and tides and water or his odds and ends of stories picked up in out-of-the-way corners of the world. Roland never forgot the night that he learned how it was by the stars that a ship was guided on her mysterious ways. Forever after the boy felt a warm gratitude to the Star of the North, "the Master Pilot," as the captain called it.

It was he, too, who pointed out a far line of porpoises that looked amazingly like so many plump-backed babies curveting, end over end, through the waves. Again, "Lean over the side," he com-

manded one day, "and you'll see something." And when Roland obeyed he found the water swarming with immense blue jellyfish that looked like shallow, stemless lilies afloat in their fairy garden.

Sometimes the boy would seek out a place where he could dream by himself of the house and the garden in France; of the joyousness that they had held; of the mother that had been the heart of the sunshine and laughter and happiness. As he stared into the blue distance, lost to everything that went on about him, the ship and he seemed to be the only living things in the hollowed turquoise of sky and sea.

One late afternoon, as he sat crouched in the bow, the captain suddenly jogged his elbow.

"Take a good breath," said he mysteriously, "a strong deep one! Now — what do you smell?"

Roland filled his lungs. An odor delightfully, vaguely familiar stirred his senses. "Something that's different from usual — it makes me think —"

"Land!" broke in the captain as if it were the first he had ever sighted. "That's what it is!" He pointed out a dim purple line that broke the eastern horizon.

"The Holy Land!" he whispered in the boy's ear. "To-morrow!"

CHAPTER THREE

DAWN found the crew of the Palestina astir. Two days' work must be crowded into one, for the captain had given out word of a prompt sailing for Egyptian ports as soon as might be after the monks had gone ashore.

No sooner had the noise of the unusual bustle made its way to Roland's drowsy ears than he was up on his feet, sure, to a certainty, of what was happening. "The Holy Land! To-morrow!" And it was to-morrow now! With that he was off for the deck, fastening his clothes as he ran.

At one side of the ship, Father Gaspard and a group of monks stood talking eagerly, and as soon as they saw him they hailed him with the good news: "Palestine, lad!" "The Land of the Cross!" The next minute they had made room for him so that he should have the best place for his first sight of the famous little land.

The line of haze of the evening before had shaped itself into a strip of vivid coast on which a sea of deepest blue beat in endless surf. Between the line of foam and the green inland stretches the sand ran like a ribbon of ruddy gold.

Presently the Palestina changed her course to due east, and there came into full view a town whose flat-roofed houses, broken here and there by

a dome, gleamed white in the early sunlight — a curious town that looked as if it were built of huge blocks set so closely together that there could be no possible space for streets.

"Jerusalem!" Roland cried in high excitement. "Isn't it?"

No, not Jerusalem, the monks told him, but Jaffa.

"Yes, Jaffa," nodded the captain, who just then was passing and heard what they said. "And I see," he observed, "that they mean to land you outside of the town — over there."

Following the quick gesture, Roland made out on the sands, just beyond the strange flat-roofed town, a crowd of people that were plainly waiting for the Crusader ship. Before he could ask the captain for further information, the air was rent by the deafening clank of the anchor chain as it slid over the edge, and at once, as if a signal had been given, there darted out from shore a swarm of small boats. Through the surf they shot, into the radiance of blue sea and gold-tipped waves and directly toward the Palestina.

"Why are they coming out here?" everybody asked at once. "Why don't we anchor nearer port?"

"Because of low-lying reefs," the captain explained good-humoredly. "There, where you see that line of surf" — he pointed to the unbroken edge of white foam — "and the boats are coming out to —"

His sentence was never finished, for at that moment there was a flash of color among the oncoming fleet, and, brave and bright, there floated out above it the great red Cross of the Crusades. In an instant the Palestina rang from stern to bow with a cheer in which every soul on board joined with a will, though who the bearer of the banner might be none could as yet make out.

The boats came on swiftly now through the dancing water, and the ship's passengers crowded forward curiously to look at the men who rowed them.

It was a hardy weather-beaten crew that they saw, whose dark eyes and strong black brows told one at once that they were of the Orient and not of the West. Their dress was of the East, too; blue cotton trousers, loose and full, that gathered close at the ankles, and a short tight jacket that scarcely reached a wide girdle wound several times about the waist and hips. Every man of them wore a red fez, but their feet were bare of shoes.

They were a good-natured, noisy lot, who called out vivacious greetings in broken French, chattered to each other in a strange language, but, in spite of all the apparent confusion, managed their boats dexterously, and maintained a certain rough order.

"What are they?" Roland ventured uneasily. "If they live in Palestine, aren't they wicked Saracens?"

"No more Saracens than you are, lad," volun-

teered one of the sailors who called every port on the Mediterranean home. "These fellows are Syrians, just the regular inhabitants of the country, with not a whit of concern in the Holy Wars."

The boat that flew the Cross now swung clear of the other craft, and its bearer was seen to be a tall, fair man in the full armor of the Crusaders. A fine, commanding figure, he kept steadily on his feet in spite of the slap and dash of the waves. The next minute he was alongside the ship, and had clambered up her rope ladder to the deck.

Such a burst of welcomes and handclasps and inquiries as met him would have overwhelmed an ordinary person, but not this smiling warrior, who was ready with greeting for greeting and an answer for each question. Every one was "Comrade" to him, and, while he gave bits of news from the Crusader camps, punctuated with a flashing smile, he made himself known as the Chevalier de Vaubois, and in the next breath added, that, as his tongue had taken kindly to the native Arabic, he acted as general interpreter to the Crusader forces. He explained, too, to the Brothers, that they were to land outside Jaffa to avoid the delay of its narrow streets, so as to get more quickly on their way to the Crusader camps near Kaiserieh, Acre — he waved a hand toward the north — even to the Jaffa encampment which was a bit inland from the town.

At once there was a clamor of inquiries: Who

would assign them to their posts, the monks asked, and when?

"To-day," de Vaubois assured them; "and there is need of you, Heaven knows," in a tone grown suddenly sober. "Father Constante," he went on, "has arranged where each of you is to go. He's over there on shore now, all ready and waiting for you — as, for that matter," he smiled, "he has been since we knew you were coming! As soon as you like, then, those fellows down there," with a glance at the noisy crew alongside, "are at your service."

There was a stir of preparation as each man took his own packet and made ready to leave the Palestina, while the Chevalier signaled the boats into line.

"All ready!" he cried, and presently he had marshaled a group of monks down the ladder and into the nearest boat.

Father Gaspard and Roland, quite content to wait their turn to the last, watched the process from the side of the ship, when all at once they heard one of the older monks ask the Chevalier if any news had been heard of the Children's Crusade.

De Vaubois looked up quickly, as if he had not understood: "Children's Crusade? What do you mean?"

It was the priest's turn to be surprised: "Is it possible that you don't know that the children of France have banded together to take Jerusalem?"

"Now you mention it, I *do* recollect that something of the sort was rumored about. I'm afraid, though," with a tolerant laugh, "that it would need more than children to take the Holy City!"

The monk flushed. He was plainly nettled by the light tone. "Why should not their young innocence succeed where you older ones have failed?" Then, more mildly: "But, however that may be, they sailed from Marseilles for Palestine a fortnight ahead of us; all except," he added, his eyes softening as they lighted on Roland, "the one we brought with us."

"The one you brought with you?" the Chevalier repeated incredulously. And then, as he followed the monk's glance and saw Roland for the first time, his easy assurance gave way to such dumbfounded amazement that the boy and Father Gaspard laughed outright.

"It's true enough, Chevalier," Father Gaspard said, as they made their way toward him; "the lad is one of a multitude of others who have pledged themselves to the holy task. And this one," he added, on sudden impulse, "has, besides, an important quest."

"My word for it, Father," de Vaubois replied seriously, "I would hardly have credited the story if you had not the boy along as proof!" He reached out an arm and drew Roland to him with a charming air of protection. "And how does it come that you're all alone, without your mates — such a

little chap and so far from home — will you tell me? Wait a bit, though," he broke off, "we'll get started for shore, first."

He glanced over the side, then nodded to Father Gaspard: "Every one's gone but ourselves, and you and the lad shall go with me." And almost before he knew it, Roland, steadied by the big Crusader from behind and by Father Gaspard in front, was down the ladder and safely in the boat that flew the scarlet Cross.

"Good-bye and good luck to you!" shouted the captain, as it put off with its three passengers.

"To you, too, Captain!" answered Father Gaspard heartily, "and a thousand thanks for a safe voyage. But aren't you coming ashore?"

"Later, for water and provisions."

"Well," laughed the Chevalier, "the peddlers and fruit vendors have been waiting for you ever since the Palestina was sighted. I even saw a shepherd with a fresh-killed sheep for sale. Everything to eat, Captain, from mutton to snow from Lebanon!"

"Good-bye!" called Roland. "Fine weather for the Palestina from Jaffa to Marseilles, and" — with an affectionate little gesture — "good luck to you always, Captain, on sea and on land!"

"Heaven keep you, lad," the gruff voice boomed out over the water, "and speed your quest!"

De Vaubois looked at Roland inquiringly: "What is this quest, lad, of which every one has so much to say?"

"To find my father," the boy replied simply. "He has been a Crusader in Palestine for two years. Perhaps you know him," he ventured — "Robert Arnot?"

"Robert Arnot?" The Chevalier appeared to search his memory. "No, I can't say I recall the name. But may Heaven bear witness if I ever heard the like of such a thing! To cross the sea," he murmured half to himself, "and nothing but a child at best!"

"Tell him how you came to do it," Father Gaspard put in quickly before the boy should have time to dwell on his disappointment at the Crusader's reply.

So Roland told his story from the beginning, when he and his mother had joined the Children's Crusade, to the night that she had left him to carry out her last brave charge. Sometimes, as the two men listened, they would turn their faces away, and more than once the Chevalier cleared his throat violently and ejaculated, "On my word! On my *word* — and such a little chap!"

"And now," Father Gaspard said in his hearty way, "you know the boy's errand, to join the Children's Crusade, and to find his father in this strange land!"

"My word for it that every Crusader of us shall make his quest our own," cried the Chevalier. "Look, now, here are some of them ready to welcome you!"

At the very edge of the water stood perhaps a dozen men in full armor, and, as the boatmen took the last stroke that drove the boat swiftly forward, the Crusaders seized the bow and ran it well up on the beach.

"Here is a new comrade at arms for you," laughed de Vaubois as he swung Roland into their midst. "Make him welcome!"

And, before the boy had time to feel shy, he was talking away with the hardy, sunburned soldiers as if they were so many boys of his own age. They could give him no news of his father, to be sure, but that wasn't strange, they told him, and, as for finding Robert Arnot, it was only a matter of thorough inquiry at the Crusader camps. "We'll see to that, lad," they assured him heartily.

Meanwhile the Brothers had gathered round a tall, pale man with the saddest face Roland had ever seen.

"Come here, child," Father Gaspard beckoned, "and pay your respects to Father Constante. I have told him about you."

The monk's melancholy face lighted as Roland came up to him.

"So!" he smiled. "A little lad for such mighty tasks as Heaven has set you!" He laid his hands on the boy's shoulders and looked deep into the blue eyes. "Ah! if they all are like that," he said half to himself, "there is hope for the Holy City!" Then, turning to the monks around him, "You

say," he asked, "that you heard no word of the Children at the ports along the way?"

"None, Father," one of them replied, "for the Palestina made no stops."

"News of them will come, however," Father Constante observed confidently. "It's bound to, by land or by sea. But now," he went on, "our business is to lose no time in setting out for your various destinations." And he began at once to assign the monks to their posts. Father Gaspard, he said, would be stationed in no one place, but was to visit the camps from time to time, as he was needed.

"But the boy, Brother," Father Gaspard broke in impulsively — and Roland saw a look of anxiety on the kind, round face — "how can I keep him by me in the plan you propose? We must not be separated, unless —"

"Oh, he will be well looked after," the other interrupted a little impatiently, "in any of our camps." And, as if the matter were settled, he went on in his sad way: "Ah! There is so much for you to do! You must make our men feel that only righteous lives may win a righteous cause! Why have they lost Jerusalem" — his voice deepened into stern despair — "the very heart of the Holy Land? Because their hands were too soiled to hold the holy places!"

There was a startled movement among the monks at the grim words, and even Roland shrank

away from this pale, austere man who smiled so seldom and who made him, somehow, uncomfortable. He threw himself down on the warm sand, for he was still a little unsteady from the motion of the boat, and, besides, he felt drowsy and hungry. The laughing and talking of the Crusaders who were chatting with the boatmen attracted his attention. Then his eyes roved to a group of men who sat cross-legged on the sand, beside baskets heaped with great clusters of tawny gold grapes, and trays of snow partly covered with leaves. They must be the peddlers that the Chevalier had mentioned to the captain of the Palestina, and they were probably waiting now for the crew to come ashore.

Presently the Chevalier himself sauntered up to a fruit vendor, handed him a coin, took something from his stores, and strolled over to Roland.

"Your first taste of Syrian fruit, boy," said he. "Hold out your hands! Olives," he explained as he poured out a handful of smooth-skinned berries, glistening and purple-black. "Every one eats them here," he went on, "so you must like them, willy-nilly!"

Roland bit into one: "I *do* like them — they taste the way sea air smells!"

"Come to think of it, they do, don't they!" laughed the man. "Well, then, when you've had your fill of them, here are some dates for your sweet tooth." He laid a cluster of the sticky fruit before the boy, and then sat down beside him.

Roland munched away contentedly enough, when all at once he happened to glance up.

In that moment he forgot the Palestina and the peddlers, forgot the Crusaders, even Father Constante and the priests. For there, on the sands, a few yards away, a man with the most remarkable face he had ever seen stood eyeing him intently.

CHAPTER FOUR

Among the careless, chattering bystanders he was a somber figure in the rough black abba[1] that hung loose from neck to ankle, and the dark turban bound around his temples by a cord. Head and shoulders above the crowd, and magnificently straight, he had a look of lean strength that made one know he had always lived outdoors, and at once you fancied him striding along, undisturbed and irresistible, in the teeth of the wind.

But it was something besides his dress and his physical strength that caught Roland's attention and held him fascinated and bewildered. At first glance he had the impression of the sweetest, gayest smile, yet the man's mouth was quite unmoved, even melancholy. Ah! It was the eyes that held the secret and solved the mystery. Dark and deep-set, they fairly laughed aloud, and at the same time declared, "I love you!" Quite unconsciously Roland's lips answered the strange beautiful eyes and broke into a smile.

From where he stood, the man said something in a foreign language to the Chevalier. De Vaubois shrugged his shoulders a trifle impatiently and answered him offhand. Without the slightest change of voice or manner the stranger repeated himself,

[1] Long outer garment.

The Crusader looked a little discomfited; then he began to talk. Every once in a while he would glance at the boy by his side.

Now, though Roland could understand not one word of what was said, he knew that the man with the deep, smiling eyes had asked a question about him and that the Chevalier was telling him what he wished to know. A curious little feeling that something was going to happen, indeed, had already begun to happen, made him sit up tingling with curiosity.

As the conversation went on, a ring of listeners formed, grew larger presently, and drew in more closely. The Franks understood only a word or two here and there, but the natives followed all that was said with the closest attention.

Just then the group of monks about Father Constante broke up, and he signed to the Crusaders to make ready now to go. Then, for the first time, he noticed the crowd around the Chevalier.

"What is all this?" he demanded impatiently.

De Vaubois laughed. "About our new Crusader, Father. You see that person over there?" He pointed out the straight, agile figure. "It appears that from the moment he saw Roland he has been unable to take his eyes off him. He demands to know why the lad is here. At first I evaded him, but he insisted, and, to get rid of him, told him what I knew."

"Well," said Father Constante, as if to end the

matter, "we need every moment of daylight; suppose we get on our way."

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth than there was a sudden commotion among the bystanders, and, without so much as a glance to right or left, the man in question had shouldered them aside and made his way straight to Roland. He smiled down on the boy a moment, then once more he addressed de Vaubois.

The Crusader stared at him in blank astonishment; then he laughed; finally he interpreted rapidly: "He says that, as long as the boy is without his parents, he himself will take care of him — he wishes to know who has charge of him at present!"

Up to this moment Father Gaspard had been so absorbed in Father Constante's plans that he had noticed neither Roland nor the Chevalier nor the group of listeners around them. But the words interpreted from Arabic to French, and spoken so every one could hear them, startled him from his reverie.

"'Who has charge of him?'" he repeated wrathfully, as he strode through the crowd. "Who asks such a question? Who is it that proposes to take him out of my hands? Who — I —" the words died on his lips as, for the first time, he saw the stranger who stood beside Roland.

The two stared hard at each other, the Syrian smiling, the Frank outraged. Then Roland, look-

ing from one face to the other, saw the anger in Father Gaspard's fade slowly into bewilderment.

The boy laughed. "I like him, don't you?" he said in a relieved tone.

Without answering, the monk turned to the Crusaders. "Who is he?" he demanded. "Do you know him?"

"Oh, yes," de Vaubois volunteered, "every one knows him. He's one of the shepherds who pasture their flocks up and down the Shephelah, these low hills to the east."

"A Syrian shepherd, you say?" put in Father Constante, unexpectedly. He leaned forward, his indifference gone, and looked from the man to Father Gaspard and then to Roland with a new interest.

"A Syrian, yes, because he's a native of this country," the Chevalier replied, "but, as a matter of fact, he's a Jew. He goes by the name of Samson, Il Yahoodi, a name, let me tell you, Father, that stands for honesty and kindness hereabout. I'll say that for it and him!"

During the fire of questions and answers between the Franks the shepherd had remained silent and unmoved, except once or twice when he and Roland exchanged a glance of friendly understanding. But when he heard his name pronounced, he seemed to come to some decision, and began to speak to the Chevalier, slowly at first, then rapidly and very urgently.

"He says," translated the Crusader, "that he would like to have the boy until his father is found; and that if you," nodding to Father Gaspard, "are to go from camp to camp, Roland, here, won't have your steady care. He can offer that, as well as good food and shelter."

"The most preposterous proposition I ever heard!" burst out Father Gaspard. "Why, in the first place, the man is a stranger to me."

"Oh, but I *want* to go with him!" Roland broke in unexpectedly. "He isn't a stranger to *me* — I like him!"

There was an instant of amazed silence and then a roar of laughter at Father Gaspard's expense, and, before he could find his voice, Father Constante stepped up to him and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Brother," said he, "it doesn't seem to me so bad a plan! Consider it."

Another turn to affairs! Again there was a gasp of surprise among the Crusaders and a smothered exclamation from Roland as he recognized in the sad-faced Father an ally of himself and Samson.

It was as the shepherd had said, Father Constante continued. The boy was scarcely well from a severe illness and must be carefully tended in this country, where everything was new to him.

Roland's eyes went anxiously from one face to the other. If only they would let him go with Samson, into the freedom of the sky and sunshine!

He wanted to climb trees, to run till he was out of breath, to throw himself down on the ground for as long as he liked, to watch the white clouds drift across the sky like lazy sheep. And then Samson himself! From the moment Roland had looked into those smiling eyes, he knew that they understood him, liked what he liked. Yes, the shepherd was a man grown, three times as old as he and more, but a boy for all that, a magnificent playfellow!

"Your argument sounds reasonable, Brother," Father Gaspard was saying slowly, "but the pledge I made to the boy's mother lies heavy on my heart."

"As for that," put in de Vaubois, "he'll be far better off with this shepherd in the open than in one of our camps. Besides," he added, "the Shephelah is within easy distance of Jaffa, and you can ride up to see the boy for yourself whenever you are there."

He turned to Samson for a moment, then back to Father Gaspard:

"He says he has a hut in the hills and that he's never far from it. He's down here just for the day, to sell some sheep. Make yourself easy, Father," the Chevalier ended with conviction, "he's the kindest shepherd in the country and as honest as he is kind — I've been up and down here for some years now, and I can vouch for that. My word for it, the lad is in good hands if he's with Samson, Il Yahoodi."

That settled matters, and Samson knew it,

though he understood not a word of the Chevalier's French. A jubilant hail of comradeship flashed between him and Roland.

"One thing more," Father Gaspard broke in anxiously, "how is the little lad to travel? He's hardly fit to walk far."

"He won't have to," de Vaubois laughed. "There's always some one on these roads ready to give one a lift. But I'll ask Samson."

The shepherd replied without a moment's hesitation, and as he spoke Roland watched him, fascinated. The words came so clearly, every sound as true and perfect as the trilled notes of a bird's song. He resolved to begin learning Arabic that very day.

Just then a curious figure edged up through the bystanders to Samson and spoke to him. Such an old man he was, so bent that he could hardly look up into one's face, with such a thin, cracked voice, and skin that was a brown network of wrinkles! Roland drew back from him with a feeling of aversion.

The shepherd nodded casually to what the old man had to say, and de Vaubois translated it at once to Father Gaspard.

"Here's some one, now, who offers his donkey to the boy; a peddler, going Samson's way. While we were about it, Father," he continued, "we've agreed on a rendezvous, Samson and I, where he and the boy are to meet us in three weeks pre-

cisely." He was silent a moment; then, "And, as it's on hostile ground," he concluded "better let me go alone the first time."

It was still an hour to noon, but cool enough to suit any one, with a fresh breeze that raced in off the sea with a tang of salt. The Crusaders moved briskly about among their horses, making final preparations for the journey, while the monks stood about divided between impatience to be off and dread of their first experience in a strange land. The Chevalier and Father Gaspard, with Roland between them, sat down on the sand to wait for Samson and the old peddler to get the donkey.

"Well, lad," the Crusader said half enviously, "this will be a fine new experience for you. To be a boy with all outdoors before one — what more could one ask? Come, now, suppose we exchange places!"

Roland laughed delightedly, but at the thought of leaving Father Gaspard he turned suddenly sober.

The monk drew the boy close to him. "I believe, my child," he said, "that we've chosen as your mother would have us, or I could never consent to have you out of my sight for an hour. You'll never be out of my thoughts, nor your father, for whom I shall make search at every camp. But, bless my soul" — as a clatter of hoofs made them all turn round — "what is all this?"

To the rear of them appeared Samson and the

peddler, and between them trotted a donkey, a brisk little beast with a pretty, intelligent face and a pair of wagging ears. He was loaded with sacks that bulged out over his sides, and around his head was a bridle elaborately worked with colored beads.

"There's your steed, Roland!" cried de Vaubois, who never lost a chance to banter.

Just then the donkey caught sight of the horses. For a second the wagging ears came to an alert standstill, then, with an eager, deafening bray, the little fellow started off, a cloud of dust and flying hoofs. But if he could run, so could Samson; and Roland, breathless with laughter, saw the shepherd bound forward, seize those furry ears and swing their owner clean around and away from the goal toward which he was headed.

"All ready now, are you, Samson?" de Vaubois called while the peddler straightened the load. "Shall the boy mount — yes?" Then, in French, "Here you are, Roland, up with you!" And Roland, half clambering, half lifted, found himself astride the strong little back and looking out over the shaggy head.

Samson turned to the Crusader and began to speak, with now and then an earnest glance at Father Gaspard.

"He assures you," translated the Chevalier, "that the boy is as the apple of his eye; and he gives you his salutation, 'Peace be with you.'"

The monk looked long into the beautiful smiling eyes.

"You're in safe hands, Roland, lad," he said at last. "May peace be with us all," he added gently.

"We shall see you before long," called the Chevalier gayly, as he and Father Gaspard went on to join the waiting monks.

Roland, between the peddler and Samson, stood aside for a moment to watch the little procession of armored figures and black-robed Brothers. Then Samson took the bridle and turned the donkey's head to the east. As he did so, there passed between him and the peddler a glance of vast amusement. With the swiftness of a rapier thrust it came and vanished. But in that fleeting second Roland saw the peddler's eyes grow wide and young and unbelievably, unforgettably keen; and then, as quickly, fade into blurred slits under his brown wrinkled eyelids. For some moments he puzzled over the look that the two men had exchanged. It startled, even frightened him a little. What could it mean? Why were they so amused? Above all, by what miracle could those old eyes become so young? He half turned to steal a glance at the wizened figure. There he was, shuffling along at the donkey's heels, apparently indifferent to everything around him.

The shepherd, on the contrary, swung vigorously along, his friendly eyes never long away from Ro-

land. Nothing to fear, the boy told himself, with Samson looking at him like that; Samson, who had flung wide to him the doors of a new world where adventure smiled and beckoned!

CHAPTER FIVE

By mid-afternoon they had left the orange groves and the gardens and the hedges of the plain. The road grew steeper, the land rougher and more open, and, farther on, to the east, it broke into low, sunny ridges. Sometimes the flat roofs of a hillside village gleamed white against the deep blue sky. Thickets of scrub oak, and orchards of trees covered with stiff gray-green leaves, alternated with patches of yellow grain. On the western horizon glittered the edge of distant sea. A pungent smell of field herbs mingled with the salt of the breeze, and the sun-flooded air, vibrant with warmth and fragrance, made an atmosphere of purest gold. Roland drew a long satisfied breath; for the first time in weeks he felt light-hearted and ready for anything.

Sometimes the peddler would turn the donkey from the traveled way into a short cut over a hill or through a valley; but whether they were on the road or off it, they were seldom out of sight or of sound of people at work in the orchards and the stone-terraced fields. The men wore full blue or white trousers and short, close jackets, or long, scant robes with broad girdles; and the women, severely plain dresses of dark blue with while veils that fell back off their faces. There were children, too, little copies of their fathers and mothers, only

that the girls had bright cotton kerchiefs tied over their dark hair.

They all greeted Samson familiarly, while they eyed Roland as if they would have liked to ask who he was had not the peddler kept the donkey up to the business of trotting briskly ahead.

Presently Roland noticed a flat space circled by stones and covered with yellow harvested grain that looked, gleaming in the sun, like a gold plate laid on the brown earth. Round and round it, a sturdy little ox, driven by a boy, drew a sledge over the wheat stalks. As Roland watched them slip easily around the yellow floor, he guessed that they were separating the kernels from the chaff. Not so dull a way, he thought half enviously, to pass a day! And no sooner had he thought it than he looked up to find Samson's eyes on him, brimming over with mischievous challenge. Roland laughed delightedly. The shepherd was as much a boy as he, and here was the proof! The next moment Samson had swung him onto the sledge, and, at the driver's nod of consent, gathered up the reins — and they were off, over the slippery, shining wheat. Once in a while the two exchanged glances.

"You see!" said the dark eyes. "This is one reason why I wanted you, so we could play together!"

"I knew it!" answered the blue eyes. "That's why I wanted to come!"

And that was Roland's first introduction to

Syrian life. Years after, at the smell of grain or straw he could shut his eyes and feel himself gliding over the wheat-strewn floor; see the sky as it was that day, a bowl of fairest blue that rested on the rim of sunny hills.

When they were on their way once more, the old peddler a silent figure at the donkey's heels, Samson took from his girdle a long brown roll that he spread before Roland. Could it be bread, the boy wondered, this great sheet, thin and pliable, and so large that he could scarcely put his arms around it? He tore off a bit of it and tasted it. Yes, bread! And so good that before he knew it he had eaten half of the loaf.

Samson watched him with huge approval; then he touched the brown sheet and spoke a single word. Roland understood that it was the native name for bread and that he was having his first lesson in Arabic. It was a little hard and began with a crisp guttural, but he managed it finally, and repeated it, to Samson's satisfaction. In the same way he learned the name for donkey and for ox. Three words that he was sure of, and to-morrow he would double that number. In no time, Samson and he would be talking, he thought joyously.

As the day grew late, Roland began to think of Samson's house — he remembered that the Chevalier had called it a hut. He found himself wondering, too, where Father Gaspard and the others were by this time. How long it seemed since he had seen

them, and how much had happened in these few hours! Darkness came all at once, and the stars, larger and more brilliant than any he had ever seen before. Still the little donkey trudged on, picking his way carefully over the stones. The boy grew drowsy, so drowsy that he swayed in his seat. Instantly Samson's arm was around him, and he settled down comfortably among the packs.

A blur of memories drifted across his mind: His mother — if she could only know how well he was to be taken care of! And his father — perhaps at this very moment he was looking at these same stars! A shadowy procession streamed before his sleepy eyes: Father Gaspard, the Crusader soldiers he had seen that morning, the Children Crusaders; and, at their head, his mother, shining, triumphant! On her shoulder he could see the red cross. Yes, all up and down the long line, the red cross on breast or shoulder. The procession melted away into darkness, the red crosses turned into great luminous stars, and Roland knew nothing more until he felt himself lifted off the donkey, carried a few steps in some one's arms, and laid down on something deliciously soft and warm.

For a moment he half opened his eyes to see where he was. In the dim light he made out Samson, and just behind him — who? The peddler? The dark wrinkled skin, to be sure, was unchanged, but the body, slender and straight as an arrow, and the eyes that glowed like black light — *whose* were

they? His thoughts flew back to that curious glance of the morning when for one quick second he had seen the blurred old eyes turn young and daring. He tried to rouse himself, to force his heavy eyelids open so that he might make sure whether or not he was dreaming, but for the life of him they *would* close. He sank back unresistingly into his coverings, and then — darkness, sleep.

The next morning he lay for some moments trying to think where he was. Gradually all that had happened yesterday came back to him, the landing at Jaffa, the ride from the coast to the hills with Samson and the old peddler. Where had he gone, he wondered, and, wide awake now, he sat up and looked about.

He found himself quite alone in a curious low-roofed room with stone walls and a clay floor smooth and hard. This must be Samson's hut of which the Chevalier had spoken, he told himself, for, though it was such a bare little place, it had an air of rough-and-ready comfort and somehow reminded one of Samson. Moreover, the shepherd's abba lay on the coverings that had kept Roland so warm all night, and which he saw, now, were a pile of woolly sheepskins. Over in one corner there were some red earthen jars, a huge metal bowl, and some covered baskets of closely woven, brightly colored straw. In the doorway hung a bag made of the skin of some animal. It was half full and looked smooth and moist. "That's to hold water," Roland decided, and he was right.

Samson couldn't be far off, he concluded; he would step out and find him. He paused a moment on the threshold to look about. It was beautiful, this Syrian out-of-doors! The low, rough hills touched to gold by the early sunlight, and the little valleys that nestled between them in blue shadow — why, it was the very place for a boy, he thought happily. He would run at once to the crest of the rise just beyond, to see what was on the other side, and probably he would meet Samson somewhere along the way.

But, just as he turned the corner of the hut, he found himself facing a building that was too curious to be passed by. It was really a large enclosed space partly roofed, and partly open to the sky, with thick walls that were easily above a man's height, and were topped, their whole length, by a mass of dried thorn. At one corner was an entrance, and, just as Roland walked up to look inside it, Samson appeared from within. He laughed delightedly and drew the boy quickly in to him, as if to say, "Come along, little comrade, here's something for you to see."

At one end of the enclosure, their fleecy backs huddled together so closely that one could almost have walked over them, Roland saw a flock of sheep. There was a quick movement among them as they saw him, two or three uneasy bleats, and here and there a pair of tossing horns.

Samson said something gently to the startled

animals and they quieted down at once. "He treats them as if they were his children," thought the boy, immensely interested and amused. Then Samson spoke again, this time in quick short syllables as though he were giving an order, while at the same time he stepped out of doors. Out came the flock after him, timidly at first, then faster and faster; and now Roland noticed their peculiar tails, great broad appendages that almost covered the hind legs, and must have weighed several pounds.

As soon as the sheep were out of their fold some of them began to stray off at once in search of fresh grass, when, suddenly, in the doorway behind them, appeared a huge ram. Roland shrank back against a wall and stared at the great creature in wonder. On the formidable head was a pair of horns so unmatched in size that it was hard to account for their belonging to the same owner. One was short and straight, the other, as fierce a specimen of horny twists and curves as ever grew, and rough and knotted as a gnarled root. But more noticeable than the horns was the ram's air of cool, sagacious impudence, as he stood still and surveyed the flock as a general might review his forces.

All at once his eyes lighted on the sheep that had scattered. Down went his head, and at a bound he was upon them, hustling and jostling and bunting them until they joined their comrades. That done, he at once made for Samson and began to nuzzle the shepherd's broad girdle, and to pull at it with

lips and teeth, until, finally, out of the loosened folds the rough tongue drew a small lump of salt. When he had licked the last grain down, he looked up expectantly.

Samson stepped back several paces and raised his arms straight to the side. As quick as lightning the ram charged forward and almost under the right arm; but, just as swiftly, the shepherd's hand shot out, seized the lowered head by its long gnarled horn, and brought the big animal up half standing.

Back went the ram to his starting-point and again the long arms met and stopped him. But the third time, just as he seemed about to drive straight for Samson's left side, he swerved swiftly to his right and with one bound shot past him and away.

"Bravo!" Roland cried again and again, and, though neither man nor ram had ever heard the word before, they knew what it meant, and went at their tilt with a spirit that left the boy spellbound at such strength and skill. Furious straightaway charges, quick turns, sidewise lunges, with not an inch given or taken; and at last, a burst of rough-and-tumble play that ended the battle, when Samson seized the ram's head, shook him gently back and forth, and pushed him over full length on the ground.

Roland ran up to them and buried his hands caressingly in the woolly neck. Samson laughed

delightedly. As he had foreseen, these two would be fast friends. He laid his hand on the animal and repeated some syllables several times. Roland knew that this must be the ram's name, and he imitated the sounds as best he could. Finally, to his joy, the wet black nose nuzzled his hand, as if to say, "I know what you mean!" Before many days Roland found that this name applied to the unevenly matched horns, and meant Father of Big and Little,[1] shortened to Abou, and Abou Kbeer, for every day use.

Samson sprang up now, and beckoned Roland into the hut. Out of the tall earthen jar in the corner he took a round white cake and gave it to the boy. Roland bit into it eagerly. It was cheese! Not like any other cheese he had ever tasted, but fresh and sweet, and wonderfully appetizing. Then Samson uncovered the other jars and the bright baskets. There was brown meal in one, tiny round lentils in another; and in still another, a quantity of black olives. "Help yourself!" Samson's smile said, and Roland, hungry enough by this time, took a handful of the fruit.

He was still munching away when Samson went out and, at one sweep of the hand, it seemed to Roland, gathered some dry thorn and lighted it into a crackling blaze. As soon as it was going well, with more brush heaped on, he put over it the huge metal bowl that Roland had noticed, and then,

[1] Abou Kbeer wa Zgheer.

in the same dexterous way that he did everything, mixed dough out of meal and water. Presently he had shaped a handful of it into a great thin sheet which he tossed onto the heated metal. A minute more, and off it came, brown and sweet, the counterpart of the bread Roland had eaten yesterday. Another sheet went onto the bowl, and another, until the dough was gone, and there was a pile of the unleavened loaves.

In two of them Samson put some olives, made a roll of them, and tucked it into his girdle.

"We're off now!" he smiled at Roland, and led the way to where the sheep waited, with Abou standing guard.

Samson called out something that was plainly, "Come along! Come along!" and like obedient children the flock moved after him. This was just as he had imagined him yesterday, Roland thought to himself, as he watched the agile, powerful figure. One could see in every movement that this man was a part of the great out-of-doors. And it was an outdoors worth belonging to, this world of sunny hills and glad skies!

To the west the green belt of plain rolled away to meet the sea that glittered like a knife edge on the horizon. Somewhere along its shore were the Crusader camps, Roland said to himself; and, between them and him, all yesterday's journey with Samson and the peddler.

That mysterious peddler! What a way he had

of possessing one's fancy! Who was he, and where had he disappeared?

Roland suddenly stepped square in front of Samson, hunched his shoulders over, sank his chin on his breast, and almost closed his eyes. Then as quickly he drew himself up straight, and threw out both his hands in a wide gesture, his eyes searching the shepherd's for the answer. And Samson understood! — though it was some minutes before he could speak for laughing at the dumb show and mimicry. At last he pointed to the east, where the land rose high and bare against the sky, as much as to say, "That is where he has gone — over there." And to find out that much in a wordless conversation, Roland told himself, was something!

By this time Abou had relaxed his vigilance and applied himself to a tuft of grass. The sheep spread out in leisurely fashion and cropped here and there, while Samson, from the slope above, kept a watchful eye on the stragglers.

Now and then Roland thought he heard human voices at a distance, or was it only the cry of some bird or animal? All at once a child's laughter rang out so clearly that the boy started, for he had thought that, except for the sheep, Samson and he were quite alone. He looked around inquiringly. Samson laughed and held out his hand, as if to say, "Come along, if you want to see the owner of that voice!"

At the turn of the valley, where the sheep

browsed, they came on a grove of the trees that Roland had noticed all along the way yesterday for their gray-green foliage; and, now that he was near them, he saw, among the stiff little leaves, the berries that he recognized as olives. The next moment he knew where the voices had come from, for everywhere through the orchard he saw groups of men and women and children talking and laughing while they gathered the olives into sacks and baskets.

There was a sudden lull as he and Samson appeared, and a fire of curious glances that brought the blood to the boy's face; then one of the men called to Samson and beckoned to him, as if they were old friends, to come where he was at work with several children and a pretty dark-eyed woman. The children hung back and watched Roland shyly from behind the trees, but their mother ran up to him with a cry of wonder and began to admire his bright hair so openly and to stroke it with such delighted little gestures that in a minute he felt at home with her.

Meanwhile Samson was speaking, with a glance at Roland or a sweep of his arm toward the sea; and, from the man's eager questions and the woman's pitying little exclamations, the story was plainly the one he had heard at Jaffa yesterday from the Chevalier.

The children forgot their shyness as Samson talked, and came out from behind the trees and

gathered round Roland. The next thing he knew, they had somehow drawn him off with them into what he recognized at once as hide and seek. He had often played it at home with his father and mother, and now, here, in this land across the sea, the familiar game was waiting for him! In and out between the trees they ran, behind the gnarled trunks, this way and that, until Roland, out of breath with laughing, forgot that he had ever been ill.

After that he came often to the olive orchards, and, almost before he knew it, he had learned so many Arabic words that, to his delight and Samson's, he could actually make short sentences.

He found that each family had a little booth made of poles and branches where they slept; that the women cooked their food outdoors in tiny clay fireplaces, and their bread, as Samson did, on a huge metal bowl over a hot flame. The children made him understand that this was not their real home, and that, by and by, when the olives were all picked, they would go away — they pointed off indefinitely — back where they lived.

From the very first they called him "Saleebi,"[1] for both from him and from Samson they learned why he had left his country and had come to theirs. They were immensely interested to hear about his father, and they promised to ask every one they knew for news of Robert Arnot.

[1] Crusader.

But about the Crusades they were quite indifferent. Roland couldn't understand that.

"Have you seen any of the battles?" he would ask eagerly. "Don't you want the Crusaders to take Jerusalem?"

No, they hadn't seen the fighting, though they had heard of it, and, as for Jerusalem, what difference would it make to them, one way or the other? But the Saleebiyin [1] themselves, that was another matter! For these great strapping strangers with "hair from the sun," these "Frangi" [2] with their fine free ways, were a source of endless wonder to the dark-eyed Syrians. Sometimes, it seemed, they would ride through a village, and for just a handful of figs or grapes they would toss gold and silver coins on the ground to see which child would be first to catch them!

There were all sorts of games that Roland learned from the Syrian children, and some that he taught them. But, whatever it was that they did or played, there was one boy, Rasheed, who was always trying to get the best of him

Rasheed was at least two years older than Roland, a good deal of a tease and something of a bully. If it was a race that they ran, he won it, or if it was tag that they played, the Frangi boy was sure to be his victim. There was only one thing at which he could be beaten, and that was climbing trees. The boys might start together, but, while Rasheed

[1] Crusaders. [2] Franks.

was still halfway up, Roland had passed him and was at the top of some swaying branch that seemed scarcely able to bear his weight.

One day he found the Syrian boy aiming at a mark with stones from a sling. He would select a smooth round pebble, place it, swing the sling swiftly round, and, with a dexterous turn of the wrist, send the stone whistling through the air full at the target. Roland looked on, fascinated and half envious. Finally he could bear it no longer.

"Let me try," he begged.

Rasheed smiled condescendingly.

"Try, Saleebi," he said, "but you can't do it." And he was right. Roland couldn't.

A good deal crestfallen, he gave it up, when all at once he happened to remember how his father had taught him to use a bow and arrow. He would show his rival a thing or two yet!

All that day and the next he spent in selecting branches of oak which he whittled and shaped into a bow and arrow; and when, at last, he set up a target and began to aim at it, it was Rasheed's turn to be envious. Here was something he couldn't do.

That evening, when Roland started to go back to Samson, he suddenly missed his arrow. Every one looked for it, high and low, but it was gone. Suddenly he caught Rasheed watching him out of the corner of a mischievous black eye, and that moment he gave up the search.

"No matter," he said, with a show of indifference, "we'll find it to-morrow — and, besides," he called over his shoulder as he walked off, "it's easy enough to make another."

But he had no intention of doing that. He would make Rasheed give up the one he had taken; yet, how to do it?

"What is it, little brother?" Samson inquired at last, for the boy had walked all the way back to the hut without a word; and, when he had heard, "Beat him with his own tricks!" was the only advice he would offer.

All at once, just at bedtime, a plan burst into Roland's head, and he went to sleep chuckling.

The next day when he sauntered into the orchard he seemed to have forgotten all about the arrow, and, on the pretense of picking olives, he swung himself up into the tree where the water bottle hung. In a flash he had loosened it and laid it level and concealed between two branches.

"There are still some olives here," he called; "they're high up, but Rasheed can get them if I help him."

"I don't need you," Rasheed returned ungraciously; but in a moment he saw he was wrong, for the bough in question was so high from the ground that it would have to be bent down to him.

"Catch the end of it from below," Roland told him, "while I stand on it."

Slowly the branches which hid the water skin

curved groundward, and Rasheed, standing on tiptoe, with his arms stretched high to catch them, got a sudden deluge of cold water in his face, down his neck, in his ears, his eyes, his mouth.

In that first choking, spluttering moment Roland had leaped to the ground and was upon him. Over they both crashed, full length, Roland on top, master of the situation.

"Where is the arrow?" he demanded.

"Let me up! Let me up!" begged Rasheed, struggling desperately.

Roland seized his head by its thick black hair and thumped the ground with it. "When you tell," he said between thumps.

And Rasheed, beaten at his own game, told: "In that tree over there."

There, to be sure, it was, high up in the hollow trunk of an old gnarled olive where it would have been safe for a hundred years — and always afterward the boys were stanch friends!

At last the olives were all gathered, and one day Roland found every one getting ready to go home. "To the little villages among the hills," Samson explained, "that we passed on the way up from Jaffa. And there," he added, "the women will pickle part of the olive crop, and the rest of it will go into a vat where a stone wheel will press the oil out of the pulp."

So it was olives that yielded the golden-green oil, as savory in food as it was useful in Samson's

earthen lamp! More than that they gave, too, Roland found, when he and Samson went to the nearest village for their winter's supply of oil, and he saw him fill a sack with the waste seeds left by the oil press.

"That rubbish, Samson?" he cried. "What can you do with it?"

"You shall see to-night, little brother," Samson promised, as he shouldered the sack; and when they had got home and the sheep were safe in the fold, he brought out a small brazier that stood on five legs, and in it made a fire of the olive stones. In a few minutes the mass was aglow, each seed a tiny red coal, with such a heat that Roland spread his hands out to shield his face.

"So you see," said the shepherd, "the olives give us food and light, and the seeds keep us warm!"

But long before all this happened, Roland and Samson had met the Chevalier as they had agreed. They left the hut before dawn, and, as they walked along in the cool starlight, Roland wondered what news there would be of his father. He had not been found, that was certain, or the Chevalier would have brought word at once to the hut; and if there had been a battle which, for Robert Arnot, as for many another Crusader, had been the last — well, even for that he would be ready, the boy said to himself. But whatever was to come, to one thing he would hold fast: to be worthy of his name, which bade him go on in the face of any odds.

Samson, with a quick guess at Roland's thoughts, began to divert him by making him repeat the Arabic he had learned, names of people, the numbers told off on his fingers, short sentences. And, before they knew it, the last faint stars had faded into the blue and rose of dawn, and Samson was saying, "Look!" For there under an oak, smiling out at them from its shadows, was the big Chevalier; and, if Roland started toward him any sooner than he had swung off his horse to meet the boy's rush, no one could have told it!

There was a rapid fire of questions and answers, and half a dozen messages from Father Gaspard; then de Vaubois began, a little hesitatingly, "Roland, lad —"

"I know," Roland interrupted; "you haven't found my father!"

"Just that, but no worse than that, thank God! How did you know?"

"Because you'd have told me the first thing, or he'd have come here himself — as he will some day," the boy supplied confidently.

"As he will some day," de Vaubois repeated; "and don't forget, lad, that no news is fair news!"

"But, Chevalier, nothing from the Children's Crusade?"

"Nothing — not the breath of a rumor."

"Where can they be?" persisted Roland.

De Vaubois shrugged his shoulders helplessly:

"You shall have the first word that comes; that's the best I can promise."

The sun was showing a thin bright edge, too high already for a lone Crusader in a country that was held by Saracens, the Chevalier reminded Samson laughingly, and he must be gone. He would send a message to the hut when to meet him again. And, next time, Father Gaspard should come, too, to hear for himself Roland's Arabic which, de Vaubois declared, he was learning at such a rate that presently he would act as interpreter for the Crusaders!

And then he was off to the coast and the sea, while Samson and Roland turned eastward to the threshing floors and the olive orchards of the bright Shephelah.

CHAPTER SIX

"I WISH," Roland said one day, "that Father Gaspard and the Chevalier could come up here to the hut, instead of sending us word to meet them."

"They can, sometimes," Samson assured him, "but just now there are too many Saracens about the Shephelah."

Roland was all excitement. "How do you know? Have you seen them?"

"Oh, yes, almost every day; I'll tell you the next time a band of them is in sight."

Roland could hardly believe his ears: these fiends, who had turned all Christendom topsy-turvy, to be so near, and Samson apparently not to care!

"Aren't you afraid of them?" he ventured finally.

Samson laughed. "Afraid! Of the Saracens that I've seen and known all my life? They're only men, except that they can sit a horse and handle a sword better than most. Besides, *we* have nothing against each other — it's the Saleebiyin with whom they're at outs."

The very next day he pointed to a hill half a mile or more to the north along whose crest a body of horsemen rode at a furious pace. Outlined against the sky, their long cloaks streaming out behind

them, they looked like dark clouds that raced before the wind.

"Saracens," he explained.

"What are they doing? Where are they going?" Roland inquired breathlessly.

"They're making sure no Frangi are about, or perhaps they are preparing for battle."

But if there was a battle, there was no sign of it on the Shephelah, and, except for fleeting glimpses of Saracen horsemen, one would hardly have known there was a war. Samson, of his own accord, never talked of it, for, as Roland soon found, it was the care of the sheep that filled the shepherd's thoughts. If they had been children he could hardly have been more tender with them. Every moment of the day — and Roland would have said of the night as well — his mind and body watched for their needs and their comfort.

When they started out in the morning Samson usually walked at the head of the flock, but, if they lagged a little, after a long day afield, he would go back and urge them gently forward, his long staff held out to bring the stragglers into line; and let a lamb stumble ever so slightly over a rough bit and Samson had it up on his arm till the way was smooth again.

Yet, with all his strength and skill, he could hardly have tended the flock so carefully without Abou Kbeer's help. If Samson led, he brought up the rear, but, if Samson stayed behind, Abou, to

the fore, would bring his forces through the narrowest gully in perfect order. Just let some unwary sheep try to crowd past the big ram, and on the instant he got such a reckoning with the powerful head and the formidable horn as would last him his lifetime! Up and down the Shephelah Abou's cleverness and sagacity were a by-word, and, when all was said, he was second only to his master at managing a flock.

To Roland the prettiest part of the care of the sheep was the calls by which the shepherds guided their flocks. Sometimes they used their reed pipes and again their voices, but each had his own emphasis or intonation that made his flock know its master's calls from all others.

"Come!" Samson would cry, "a shady spot for you." Or, "Good pasture here," his pipe would trill; and again, "To the fold, my children, to the fold!" And, like so many docile children, the sheep would come or go as he told them.

Sometimes at the watering-troughs he found other shepherds ahead of him. Without the slightest confusion his sheep would gather about him, and, as the other bands finished drinking and moved off, he would lead his own to the troughs. If there was not room for all of them at the same time, he would hold out his long crook and give quick, short orders: "To the right, now!" "You to the left, to the left, mind!" And presently the sheep, passing to one side or the other of the staff,

were divided, half of them with Samson at the troughs, the others waiting their turn with Roland and Abou at their head.

When the day's business of grazing had begun, and the sheep had spread out over some sunny hillside or quiet valley, Abou gave himself up to full enjoyment. For the time he forgot that he was the leader and frisked and played like the youngest of the flock.

It occurred to Roland one day to run along on all fours beside him. Abou thought the boy was playing some new game, and only eyed him curiously and pushed him gently over. Finally Roland made him understand that they were to run together. At first his muscles ached from the new position, and he lagged far behind, but in a surprisingly short time he could walk on his hands and feet at a fairly good pace. "Playing sheep," he called it; and, as he trotted along beside the ram, he looked, from a distance at least, the part he took.

Samson was delighted. He wished *he* could bend his back and legs to the new game; but he urged Roland to practice every day until he could keep up with Abou or even beat him at a run.

"The day you can do that," he declared, "I'll give you a pair of slings."

Roland was enthusiastic at once: "Do you think I can hit a mark the way Rasheed did?"

"Of course, in time; and you shall begin to learn to-day."

That would be something worth telling to Father Gaspard and the Chevalier, Roland said to himself; and the very next day would bring him the chance, for to-morrow Samson and he were to meet them. He hardly dared to hope for news of his father, but of the Children Crusaders there would surely be word, and he fell to thinking of them and of how very soon, now, they would take Jerusalem. Just where was it, he wondered, this city that the Crusaders wanted so much; then aloud, "Where is Jerusalem, Samson?" he demanded.

Before he replied, the shepherd rose to his feet, and it struck Roland that his manner became, all at once, austere, reverent.

"There." He pointed to the east where the land, steep and high, cut the sky in a hard blue line. "There, only a few hours away."

"A few hours away? Why, one can get there quickly!"

"Yes; only the path is very steep and rough."

In his fancy Roland saw the long procession of Holy Children making its triumphant way along up the heights to the Holy City, and he began to tell Samson as well as he could of the thousands of French children who had left their fathers and mothers to accomplish the great mission.

Samson listened in silence, but, when the boy had finished, he said, very quietly, "Jerusalem is *my* city, the city of my people."

"*Your* people, Samson? Who are they?"

"The Jews."

Roland remembered now that he had heard him called "Il Yahoodi," without thinking what the name meant.

"But where are your people?"

Samson threw out his arms in a sorrowful gesture that seemed to sweep from the farthest eastern heights to the shimmering line of western horizon.

"What do you mean? Don't you know?" persisted the boy.

"They are gone! Scattered!"

"Won't they come back?" Roland inquired anxiously.

But Samson, his eyes on the distant eastern heights, seemed not to hear him. In his face there was the strangest mixture of mournfulness and of hope.

"Some day when you understand more," he said at last, "you shall hear more." Then, at the boy's puzzled look, the smile in his eyes came back, and he added, "I'll tell you, when the time comes, little brother."

It was a bewildering country, Roland thought to himself: Jerusalem, the city of Samson's people, yet the prize for which the Crusaders struggled, while the Saracens actually possessed it! For the first time there crept into his mind a suspicion that Samson didn't believe that the Children's Crusade could take Jerusalem! Worse still, a shadow of doubt clouded his own confidence. Then with

sudden relief he remembered that to-morrow he would see Father Gaspard and the Chevalier — *they* would set things straight again!

But the next day there were so many questions to ask and to answer, so much to hear of Father Gaspard's visits to the camps, and to tell of Samson and Abou Kbeer, that, at first, Roland forgot to speak of what had weighed so heavily on his spirits. There was still nothing to say of his father. "Though," Father Gaspard explained, "we haven't yet been able to reach all the Crusaders to inquire for Robert Arnot."

"Haven't you found any one that knows him, any of his comrades?" Roland asked a little unsteadily.

"Not one, boy," admitted de Vaubois, "but that isn't so much of a wonder, for our camps are scattered, and distances aren't quickly covered."

"It's going to take time and patience, my child, more than we thought," Father Gaspard interposed, "but every one of us keeps his eyes and ears open for news of Robert Arnot. Of that you may be sure."

Samson had stood quietly by all this time, but now he spoke to de Vaubois: "You have no word of the father — I can tell from your faces and voices; then let the child stay with me. Don't take him away!" he begged.

"How is it, lad?" asked the Chevalier. "Will you come with us, or stay here?"

"Here," Roland replied with decision, "till my father comes. Samson," he appealed to the shepherd, "do you want me? Am I a trouble to you?"

"A trouble!" laughed Samson. "A trouble! As much as the sun is to the earth or rain to a thirsty land! Why" — he turned to Father Gaspard and the Chevalier — "the boy is the very apple of my eye! From the moment I saw him I wanted him for my own!"

"And I want to stay with Samson," Roland put in eagerly; then, with a sudden recollection of their talk about Jerusalem, he added, "until the Children's Crusade comes."

"We hear nothing of them," Father Gaspard said gravely. "I myself feel certain that some calamity has come to them, though, it may be, as some think, that they have stopped somewhere on the way, or even that, for some reason, they have turned back to France."

"But when they *do* come, are you sure that they will take Jerusalem from the Saracens?" The boy's face was as anxious as his voice.

To his dismay, no one answered. The tall Crusader turned his face away; Father Gaspard looked troubled, cleared his throat once or twice as if to speak, and ended by saying nothing.

"Well, lad," de Vaubois said at last with an attempt at cheerfulness, "who can tell until we have seen them try?"

So here was doubt, too, in the mind of the sol-

dier and of the priest, as well as in the shepherd's, for all they had tried to conceal it. Why didn't they have faith in the Children's Crusade, the boy wondered, with a cold fear at his heart? Why had the priests urged it so fervently in France? They had been sure enough *then!*

"Come along, little brother," said Samson, when the two men had ridden away, "the Saracens won't catch us, but the sun will"; and even as he spoke the first yellow rays shot over the eastern hills.

It seemed to Roland as they swung along together that he had never before seen Samson in such high spirits. Even his own gloom grew less heavy in the light of the smiling eyes.

"Samson," he said, pressing up to him, "are you glad because I'm going to stay with you?"

Yes, that was it, the shepherd declared happily. "What in the world would Abou and I do without you, little brother?"

At mention of Abou, Roland had a vision of the big clever ram with his impudent, knowing ways, of the sunny hills and the sheep scattered over them like so many gray-white clouds! Oh, but it was good to be going back to it all!

"Samson," he said eagerly, "I can almost keep up with Abou now."

"And before long you'll be slinging stones into the center of our target like any Syrian boy," Samson laughed.

He stopped all at once and took hold of Roland's sleeve.

"You wouldn't mind wearing our Syrian clothes, would you? Your own are wearing out and when the winter rains come you'll be cold. I'll tell you what we'll do, little brother," he went on, "we'll turn off here and go home by way of the village where Rasheed lives. His mother will make some clothes for you. She's especially good at weaving abbas. How would you like one to keep you warm, of black-and-white goat's hair like this one of mine?"

And before many weeks Roland, in a blue cotton garment that was bound round him by a broad girdle, with a warm abba over it, looked, for all the world, like a little Syrian shepherd lad.

"You remind me," said Samson, "of myself when I was a boy and ran over these hills as you do!"

"These hills?" Roland echoed. "Did *you* live here when you were a boy?"

"Where else?" laughingly. "Little brother, this is *my* country, these are *my* hills" — he stretched out his arms in a wide embrace — "even as they belonged to the man for whom my mother named me!"

Roland glanced around quickly: "Does he live here, too?"

"I sometimes think he does, for all the hundreds of years ago that he roamed the Shephelah as you and I do to-day!"

"Hundreds of years ago! What do you mean?"

Samson became serious: "I'll make a bargain with you," he said finally. "I'll tell you about this Samson of long ago when you know enough of our language to understand all of my story!"

And Roland sprang to the challenge with such a will that Samson declared he even dreamed aloud in Arabic.

"I'm not going to speak it as the Frangi do," he assured Samson, "but like a Syrian!"

One night he sat by the shepherd, counting by fives to a hundred, when all at once they heard a rasping sound outside, as of metal drawn over stone. The next minute Samson had the door open, and a man, wrapped in black from head to foot, stepped into the hut.

"Welcome, and a thousand welcomes!" cried Samson. "Where have you been so long?"

The man turned so that the light from the tiny wick flickered across his face. Roland, watching him curiously, drew a startled breath. Somewhere he had seen him before! It was the eyes! They made him think somehow of black rain clouds shot with lightning. What was there so familiar about them? he asked himself.

"Where have I been?" the stranger was saying. "From north to south, from sunset to sunrise!" He stretched out his arms as if he were tired, and flung back his black silk abba. Roland caught the gleam of a scabbard among the folds, and it came

into the boy's mind that the man himself was like a sword. Every motion of his body made one think of something swift, sharp, unerringly sure, like a keen knife edge or a sword blade or an arrow flying true to its aim.

"It's cold to-night," Samson said. "Sit down here, Khaleel." And he pushed the man toward the brazier with an affectionate little gesture.

They must be old friends, reflected the boy, very old friends, indeed.

"I wanted to see this little Frangi that every one talks of on the Shephelah!" Khaleel said unexpectedly, and he turned his gaze full on Roland.

The boy stirred uneasily. Did he imagine it, or were those luminous eyes challenging him to recollect where he had seen them before?

"I'm not only a Frangi," he retorted, a little nettled, "I'm a Saleebi!"

Instantly the teasing expression vanished from the keen, dark face, and the eyes turned winning as a sunny day.

"Frangi or Saleebi, you are a man-child from the garden of Allah!" He reached out a hand, and grasped Roland's bright hair. "Look, Samson," he went on, "like the desert sand when the sun first sets it afire!"

Roland, meanwhile, was wholly engrossed by the scabbard that hung at Khaleel's side and glittered with every move of his body. Involuntarily the boy's hand stole toward the shining thing.

"Ah!" cried Khaleel, and he and Samson laughed. "A real man-child! Come, and I'll show you the kernel within the husk."

He drew out the sword and laid it across Roland's knees, a gleaming curve of blue steel along whose hilt ran a tracery of leaf and bud that blazed into the full bloom of flowers, made entirely of precious stones, crimson and blue and green. Why! Roland reflected, even his father's sword was a rough thing compared with this, and almost reverently he put a finger to its edge.

"Show the lad what you can do with it," said Samson.

Khaleel stood up and swung the sword twice around his head. Then came, in quick succession, several forward thrusts, as at an imaginary foe; a parry, when the blade, pointing down for a second of time, bore the full force of the enemy; a blue streak upward, and an overhead cut; suddenly a swift downward drop and an inward swing that left the enemy to lunge helplessly forward; and now — a terrible shoulder-level stroke! Another! The streak of blue lightning came to rest and became once more a shining crescent in Khaleel's hand.

Roland drew a long breath; he had never imagined anything as terrible as this sword play, nor as beautiful, and for the life of him he could hardly help a startled glance into the shadows where Kahleel had thrust. Samson caught the boy's look

and laughed, but Khaleel only slipped his blade into his sheath and reached for his abba.

"Il Howa [1] is waiting," he remarked to Samson.

"Il Howa!" Roland echoed. "How can the *wind* wait?"

"Come and see, little Saleebi," Khaleel answered.

"I go first," said Samson, and he stepped outside, stood there a moment as if he were listening, and then walked toward the sheepfold. Without a word, Khaleel followed, while Roland, close behind and agog with curiosity to discover what the mysterious Il Howa might be, heard the soft thud of a hoof, and saw, all at once, a dark form loom out of the night.

"A horse, Samson — isn't it?"

"Who comes rightly by his name — yes."

Even in the dark, one made out the slender, powerful legs and the spirited curves of the body.

Roland's hand went up to the long mane: "Why, it's as soft — as soft — as my own hair!" he exclaimed.

"Why not?" laughed Khaleel. "Not a day of his life that every inch of his body hasn't been brushed and cared for by my own hands. Feel!" — and he guided the boy's hand along the glossy flanks and silky tail. He bent down to tighten the girths, then straightened up and threw his arms around Il Howa's neck, and for a moment the two

[1] The wind.

HE HAD NEVER IMAGINED ANYTHING AS TERRIBLE AS THIS SWORD PLAY

stood motionless, cheek to cheek, the horse's nose sunk in the man's neck.

"I should like to see him by daylight!" Roland said half enviously.

"You shall," Khaleel assured him, as he sprang into the saddle. "Sometime when you are out on the hills with the sheep, we shall come."

That night Roland lay awake for a long time thinking of Khaleel and his bewildering sword, of the mysterious way he had appeared out of the night and then vanished into it. There was something puzzling about it all, and, in spite of the frank, open ways of both men, he had a vague feeling that they were keeping something from him.

And then, suddenly, there flashed into his mind the answer to the puzzle, an answer so startling that without knowing what he did he sprang out of bed, but so convincing that he knew it was right. He knew now why Khaleel had appeared so quietly, why Samson had guarded him so carefully when he had gone out-of-doors to Il Howa; above all he knew why Khaleel carried that lightning-like sword and how it happened that he used it with such skill.

"Samson!" — and before there was time for an answer he announced his discovery — "Samson, Khaleel is a Saracen!"

There was a silence; Samson stirred a little in his coverings, then he got up and came to Roland: "Yes," he said gravely, "Khaleel is a Saracen."

He hesitated a moment, then, in the same serious tone, "And such a dangerously wise one that the Saleebiyin have put a price on his life!"

So that was why Samson had not told him who Khaleel was! A careless word to the Chevalier, now, or to Father Gaspard —

"Samson" — the boy put out his hand impulsively and grasped the shepherd's — "you needn't be afraid of me," he whispered, with a strange little feeling of loyalty to the Saracen that he could hardly have explained.

After that Khaleel came several times at night, and once in the early morning, on purpose, he declared, to keep his promise that Roland should see Il Howa by day.

Then the winter rains set in and Samson said they would have no more visitors for a while, as neither Saracen nor Saleebi would put his horse to the muddy roads till the sun had dried them fit for travel.

But, though the prediction proved true, and neither Khaleel nor Father Gaspard and the Chevalier showed themselves, Samson and Roland, left to themselves and the hills, never had time to be lonely. Good pasture must be found for the sheep, and between whiles there were a hundred things for Roland to learn about tending them. They were never afraid of him now, and, whenever Samson trusted him to lead, they would follow as if they had always known him. The sheep calls were the hard-

est task, but he would get them, Samson assured him.

As for running beside Abou Kbeer, it had come to be almost as easy as walking upright; and at last there came a day when Samson, watching eagerly, saw the boy abreast of the ram, and, a moment later, ahead of him, unmistakably ahead, and gaining steadily!

"Good!" he called, "I saw you! Abou Kbeer has his equal, little brother." And he took from his girdle two slings and handed them to Roland, not plain ones of black and white, but woven with tiny figures of red and blue. "Now!" he said, "You must do as well by these as you have by Abou!"

"I'll get some good pebbles for them from a brook bed on the way home," Roland said; but when he came to look, the stony course that had been so dry was a running stream. It would be higher to-morrow and there would be others like it in the ravines, Samson predicted, with his eyes on the lowering sky; and no sooner were the sheep safe in the fold than there was a long roll of thunder, followed by raindrops on the earth roof of the hut. All at once a faint crackle seemed to rise from the ground, then, with a long-drawn gasp, it soared upward and burst into deafening fury; and Roland, from the doorway, saw a jagged flame stream down the sky to the hills and leap from peak to peak, once, twice, three times! He drew in his breath sharply, and shrank back.

"That," said Samson, "is the sword of Jehovah Himself!"

Roland glanced up at him quickly. The shepherd's voice sounded as it had that day when he had spoken of Jerusalem.

"Who is Jehovah?" inquired Roland a little timidly.

Samson made no reply at once; in fact, standing there with his arms folded across his breast, his face lifted to the sky, he seemed very far away.

"Who is He?" Roland repeated.

"The One and Only, the Maker of all," Samson said at last; and Roland understood that Jehovah was God, of whom his mother had told him.

He remembered, now that he thought of it, that she had used almost the same words, too: "He made everything," she had said; "you, little Roland, and the earth and sky; even this," and she had picked a tiny, insignificant flower from the grass. He wondered if, when Khaleel said, "Allah be praised," he meant *her* God as well as Samson's Jehovah. Could it be that Christian and Jew and Saracen had the same God, only called by a different name? He would ask Samson to-morrow! For Samson, as Roland was finding out, always understood what one was thinking about, and could explain anything under the sun!

But the next day brought something that crowded all but itself from the boy's mind.

Abou and he had started the flock out earlier

than usual and were heading them for the next valley when they were startled by a sound of rushing water. What Samson had said that the rain would make of the dry watercourses was already true, and now, he explained to Roland, they were violent torrents from which the sheep must be kept away lest they fall into them. So, with Abou in the lead, the flock was driven up a hillside and then to a stretch of high pasture that looked as safe as sheep or shepherd could wish.

From here there was a view of the lower levels and of the streams that had formed almost overnight.

"When we go home we'll have to find a way around that valley," Samson had just observed, when, without warning, and almost under their eyes, a slice of the upland dropped out of sight, and, along with it, a full-grown sheep. There was a rumble of sliding rocks and earth, then a startled bleat, and one of the lambs had leaped after its vanishing mother. In less than a moment half a dozen more panic-stricken animals would have followed, but in that moment, Samson, at a bound, put himself between them and the brink of the new-made precipice.

"Stand back!" he warned Roland, "I'm going after the two sheep. You must take care of the flock."

His voice was as soft as if he were soothing the flock, and so he really was, for he knew that

the instant he betrayed the danger that threatened, his control of them would be gone. Even now some of them stopped browsing and huddled together, surging toward him. Abou stood motionless, one forefoot raised, his great head lifted high.

"Turn them in the opposite direction," continued the even tones, "there's not a minute to lose. Put Abou Kbeer at their front and give the call to go home." He flung off his abba and the rope he always carried, and began to pick his way over the freshly torn earth.

Already Roland was obeying. He could feel his knees tremble, partly from excitement, but much more from fear that the sheep would refuse to follow him, and that, try as he would, he could hardly keep them from leaping after the shepherd and so to their death. But, taking his cue from Samson, he went along quietly, speaking to this animal, and patting that one's head. Then, as best he could, he gave the call that meant "To the fold!"

The sheep wavered a moment, grew calmer, and presently began to heed the familiar order. Roland ran up to Abou and laid hold of the rough horns. "Come along, brother," he urged. "Faster, Abou Kbeer, faster!" And Abou, who knew as well as any one that trouble was afoot and that he must shoulder his end of it, trotted forward at a smart pace, while Roland, back again at the rear of the sheep, drove them gently forward, and put all his

heart into the call for "Home" and "The fold!"

A little more and he had them over the brow of the slope at a safe distance from the landslide, and here, he said to himself, he could leave them with Abou, while he went back to help Samson. He flung his arms around the ram's neck: "Stay by them, brother," he whispered; "take good care till we come."

Back, now he raced to where Samson's abba lay, and presently he was looking down the ragged gash that had gouged into the hillside. The first thing that he saw was the full-grown sheep, quite dead, and half buried by loose stones; then, in the lee of a great boulder, he made out Samson's tall figure bending over an uprooted oak, while he carefully freed its branches from the earth.

"Samson!" he called, "what are you doing?"

Without stopping his work to look up, Samson said quietly, "The lamb is alive, but it's penned in here fast." And for the first time Roland saw, entangled and caged by the oak boughs, the lamb that had leaped after its mother.

"I'll come down and help!" — and he put a foot over the edge.

"Stay where you are!" Samson told him, so sharply that he drew back, startled and confused. "Make the rope fast up there, and throw the other end to me."

A little back from where he stood, Roland found a good-sized rock, passed the rope twice around it,

knotted a pebble to the other end and tossed it into the shepherd's hands. How slowly he worked! Why didn't he wrench the lamb free at once and have done? And then, as the boy looked more closely, he suddenly saw the reason of the cautious movements and of the stern order to stay where he was: the boulder, in whose very shadow Samson stood, that seemed at first sight to be firm in its bed, was held in place only by the uptorn oak, a frail enough rampart that would never keep it, once started, from crushing everything that lay in its path!

In this new light the lamb had scarcely a chance, and its master, Roland said to himself, would never leave it, even if —

"Now," Samson said, "I have enough of these limbs out of the way," and he slipped the rope around the lamb and knotted it. The little creature sent up a frightened bleat. "Don't cry," he said caressingly, "You're safe now!"

Roland bit his lips hard. Had he imagined it or was there a breath of motion among the upturned roots?

"You have the other end fast?" Samson spoke quickly, and Roland saw that his eyes were fixed on the rock. "Now, mind, lad," the words came sharp as a whiplash, "don't let go, no matter what happens."

In the next breath he had lifted the lamb clear of the tangled boughs and tossed it to one side, while

Roland, with the rope biting into his palms, heard an ominous rumble, saw the upturned tree bend and fall, and, in the same moment, saw Samson plunge down the slope with the boulder thundering at his heels. Then with a mighty twisting leap he swerved to one side, while the rock, gathering speed, hurtled past him to the bottom.

Roland leaned over and drew the lamb up in his arms, just as Samson turned and flashed back a triumphant smile.

"I'll go around and meet you at the other end," he shouted. And no sooner had Roland got the lamb over the hill and back to the browsing flock than Samson swung jubilantly up the slope toward them.

"You saved the day, little brother!" he called out. "I never could have done it alone."

"Oh, Samson, I wasn't anything! You did it all — you and Abou! Why, you were quick as lightning!"

Samson leaned down to stroke the little creature that he had saved. "It was worth all the trouble," he said tenderly; then his face sobered: "We were fortunate to lose only one; half of them might have gone if they had been near the poor creature that was carried down first."

"What made the hill drop away so?"

"The heavy rains. The earth on that side of the rise was so soaked with water that it couldn't hold any longer. If it had happened at the mouth of a

cave, and we had been in there seeking shelter from a shower, our flock would have been without shepherds to-day!"

"Do caves fall in?" Roland inquired.

"Not very often, but there's no hope for any one who is caught in them when they do. I lost my father that way when I was younger than you. He had gone into one of them to dig for sand. My poor mother — I shall never forget her face when the men came to tell her."

Samson had flung himself down in the midst of his sheep, and Roland knew by the absent look in the dark eyes, half smiling and half sad, that they were gazing back across the years.

"Tell me about it, Samson," he urged, "when you were a boy, and about your father and mother."

"Yes," Samson agreed at once, "I will. I'd like you to know, little brother.

"After my father died," he began, "I stayed a great deal with my mother. I remember how she took my face between her hands, and told me that as death had come suddenly to my father so it might to her — who could tell? — and that, in whatever days were left to us together, she wished to teach me as much as possible of our people, of Jehovah's people. She always spoke of the Jews so. 'And these things that I tell you,' she would say, 'you must ponder in your heart, little Samson.' That was the word she used, *ponder*."

Samson paused, with the far-away look in his

eyes, and Roland was very still, for he knew that the shepherd was uncovering a picture that was too precious to be often looked on. Moreover, his own heart was bursting with the memory of another mother, bright-haired and blue-eyed, who had held him to her not so long ago, even as the Jewish mother had held the little Samson.

"My mother's father," Samson went on, "was a learned man and had taught her a great deal about the history of the Jews. You must know, little brother" — he spoke slowly, choosing his words with care — "that very, very long ago this country was given to our people by Jehovah, these hills around us, those heights over there where Jerusalem is, and still more besides; but stronger nations than we conquered us and then carried off most of us to their countries."

"But, Samson, why don't your people come back here?"

"Well, that's just what I used to ask my mother, and she would say that no one could tell; but that, wherever they were, they were still Jehovah's people, and their main business was to prove themselves so by obeying Him. 'And your part,' she would tell me, 'is to make the best of our great men's lives come true in yours.'

"Now, our people," Samson explained, "lived out of doors a great deal; they ploughed and planted and harvested, and tended sheep. Every boy and man of them could use a sling, and I suppose there

wasn't a hill or a brook or a cave that they didn't know. They were a hardy, rugged people, and my mother wanted above all things to have me like them. So she named me for the strongest one of them."

Roland looked up expectantly. Could it be that Samson was going to tell the story he had once promised him?

"I remember," the shepherd continued, "that we were sitting on the roof of our house where we could watch the sunset when she told me about him, this lad, who had lived here on the Shephelah hundreds of years ago, and —"

Roland could restrain himself not another moment: "Samson" — an eager hand on the shepherd's arm — "is this the story you promised me when I should know enough Arabic?"

"The very one, little brother," smiled Samson, and Roland settled back contentedly.

"He was a fine, sturdy fellow, it seemed, always in the open, in and out among these fields and olive orchards and vineyards, playing games with his mates, running races, wrestling with them. And he was as sunny of heart as he was strong of limb, brimming over with fun and mischief. Whatever was on hand, young Samson could always manage to come out ahead, whether it was to jump highest or climb a tree fastest or sling a stone truest."

"Just what we used to do, Rasheed and the other children and I," Roland reflected aloud.

"Exactly," Samson assented, "for things are about the same now as they were in Samson's time.

"Now, on this plain yonder, between us and the sea, lived a tribe, called the Philistines, who were always quarreling with our people. Some of the Shephelah villages belonged to the Philistines and some to the Jews, and it was on these disputed hills of the Shephelah that, year in and year out, the two nations would fight, come to terms for a while, and fight again.

"Samson could beat the Philistine boys as easily as he did the lads of his own nation, and this made our enemies hate us all the more. Nevertheless, Samson was always the champion, no matter what the test was, and as he grew older his feats attracted the notice of the Philistines, and then their jealousy and their hatred.

"You may be sure he didn't trouble himself to pacify them; he only laughed, and then he took to playing tricks on them. Once he caught a lot of foxes, tied bits of tow to their tails, set it on fire, and then turned them loose in the Philistines' wheatfields. And of course that was the end of the wheat for that season!

"Another time the Philistines discovered that Samson was in one of their cities, so they stationed guards at the outer gates to catch him on his way home. When everything was quiet for the night, young Samson made his way out to the gates. He found them locked, to be sure, their keepers

stretched out on the ground as comfortably asleep as if they had been in their own beds! And without so much as a by-your-leave he lifted the gates from their hinges and walked coolly off with them to the top of a hill where he left them for his enemies to find as they might!

"By this time the Philistines were furious. They began to suspect that there was a reason for his strength, and they set all sorts of traps to find out what it was. And their suspicions were right — it didn't just *happen* that he was stronger than every one else.

"He was immensely amused at their stupid ways of discovering his secret, and first he would tell them one thing and then another. 'If you'll bind me with new ropes,' he said one day, 'you'll find I can't break them.' But, when they tried it, the impudent rascal just stretched out those powerful arms of his, and snap went the cords, and off walked young Samson laughing at his dupes.

"But at last, one day, he grew tired of being asked why he was so strong, and he told a Philistine woman the truth of the matter. It seemed that at his birth his father and mother had promised that he should never have his hair cut, and it was in that length of unshorn hair that his power lay. But they had vowed the great strength that they knew their boy was to have to the service of Jehovah and His people, while he always seemed to be thinking how he could use it in tricking the Philistines

just for the glorious mischief of it, instead of in the service of his people's God!"

"Oh, but, Samson," Roland broke in, "I like him for being so clever and so full of fun. I wish he were here this minute!"

"So do I, little brother!" agreed the shepherd warmly. "The great, strong, happy fellow roaming over these hills, his hair floating out over his shoulders — yes, I wish he were here, too!"

His face changed suddenly and a sorrowful expression came into it.

"When the Philistine woman had found out the secret of his uncut hair, she waited till he was asleep and then she had his head shaved close and gave him up to his enemies. It's hard to tell you the rest, little brother," he broke off, "it hurts to say it out loud."

"They didn't — *kill* — him, Samson?"

"If they only had! But they knew what was worse than death, those Philistines. They — they — put his eyes out — they bound him with bands and chains — "

"Samson! Not *that* to him?" Roland cried out in an anguish of protest.

"There, little brother, there" — the shepherd might have been comforting a grieved child — "it's over and done with, long, long ago, and Samson himself has rested in peace these hundreds of years. Yes," he went on, "they bound him and took him to one of their cities and made him grind

in the prison house. But there came a day" — Samson's voice took on a new deep note — "when all his humiliation was turned in the twinkling of an eye into triumph, terrible triumph.

"The Philistines had a great gathering in one of their temples, and some one proposed that the man who had so often made them the butt of his jokes and the victims of his strength should be brought in before them all and publicly ridiculed. So Samson was led in and put between two of the temple pillars. As he stood there, he lifted up his whole soul to Jehovah and asked to have his strength back for just once more. And Jehovah heard him! Then Samson took hold of the pillar on each side of him and bent his whole body in one tremendous effort, and the temple with every one in it crashed down to death!"

"I'm glad of it," Roland cried hotly; "I'm glad they were killed, all of them! But, oh" — his voice was hardly audible — "I'm *so* sorry for him!"

"Yet he had what he wanted most in that last moment of life! And as for that, little brother, I often think that the best part of him has never died, in all these hundreds of years. These hills and the sunshine and the winds are full of him!"

Samson stretched out his arms and took a long breath. "It's just as my mother said to me, that I must make the best part of his life come true in mine. And it *has* come true, the happiness and freedom of the outdoors, and the strength!"

Roland had a sudden memory of the shepherd as he had leaped ahead of the rolling boulder. Who else, he wondered, could possibly have had the agile power to do such a thing? "Tell me more about him!" he urged.

"Not to-day," Samson said. "You must do what my mother told me, 'ponder these things in your heart,' and another story now might put this one out of your head, little brother.

"When I got to be perhaps fourteen or fifteen," he went on, "I told my mother that I wanted to be a shepherd right here on the Shephelah. What in the world could be happier than to have a flock of sheep, all my own, and to roam the day long with them, year in and year out, over these hills that I loved? And I liked the thought of taking care of them, of having them depend on me!" He looked affectionately at the peaceful animals browsing around him.

Roland laughed. "They're just like your children, aren't they?"

"Yes; I like to find the best pasture for them and to see that they get good water to drink. And then to have them come at my call, and to carry the tiny lambs over the rough places — oh, there's nothing like it!

"Well, when my mother knew that I wanted to be a shepherd, she was so happy! I shall never forget how her face lighted up! 'You are following in the steps of your people's great men,' she said, 'for

our greatest and best king and some of our prophets and leaders were shepherds.' And it seemed that our own mighty Jehovah had often been likened to a shepherd and we, His people, to His flock.

"When we were talking all this over together, I said that I didn't want to be like some of the Syrian shepherds with no real home, sleeping wherever they happened to be at night, sometimes in the open, sometimes in a cave. No, I wanted a place that I could call my own, and a fold, a safe stout fold for my sheep. What plans we used to make, she and I!"

Samson looked off at the distant hills for some moments; then he said quietly: "But before any of them came true, she went away, quickly, as she had thought she might go. And yet," with a quick smile, "I've always felt that she was with me!"

In an instant Roland's face lighted. "I know what you mean! I've often thought that about *my* mother, that she was here in the sunshine and the blue sky."

"I'm sure of it, little brother," Samson agreed warmly, "sure of it. So it seemed the most natural thing in the world to go on with the plans we had made together, and right away I began to build my hut. Rasheed's father helped me, and so did some of the men from the village. When we came to the fold, they thought I took too much pains with it. 'Why, you're more particular with it than you are with your own shelter,' they said. But I

knew that sometimes — not very often, to be sure — lions and leopards make their way over onto the Shephelah."

Roland looked up, a little startled: "Make their way over from where?"

"Oh, I suppose from the desert, or the Ghor,[1] east of Jerusalem. However, that happens very seldom; but there are always jackals about, so I made the walls of the fold high, and then, for greater safety, I put thorn bushes along the top. Finally, I roofed part of the enclosure so that my flock could be dry and warm when it rained. Then I began to buy my sheep, and by the time I was twenty-one I had as many as I have now."

"How did you think of Abou Kbeer's name?" Roland inquired.

"Oh, it wasn't I, but Khaleel, who gave it to him."

"Did you know Khaleel *then?*"

Samson laughed at the boy's astonishment. "And long before! When we both were mere lads, I used to see him riding about here, even when the Frangi held the Shephelah. He has always dared to do anything or go anywhere; and now he has a boy just like that — Saleem!"

"Oh! I *would* like to see him! How old is he?"

Samson reflected. "You're twelve — Saleem must be two or three years older than that. I've never seen him," he added ,"but I've heard that he

[1] The gorge of the Jordan River.

looks just like his father, and rides like him — like the wind! But look at the sun," he broke off suddenly, with a glance at the bright western horizon, "it's time we were getting home. Come along, Abou!"

Roland sprang up, caught the ram around the neck, and shook him back and forth. "Old rascal," he cried affectionately, "what would we have done without you to-day, or, for that matter, any day? Come, brother," he dropped on his hands and feet, "let's go sheep fashion." And off they started side by side, the ram trotting ahead for a few paces and then hurrying to catch up when Roland took the lead.

Samson, from behind, cheered them on, and clapped his hands as he did when he was especially pleased and amused.

"Doesn't it tire you to turn into a sheep," he asked — "your back and legs?"

"Not a bit! Why, I could go that way all day, I believe!"

"Khaleel should see you do it," Samson declared, "he'd laugh for an hour! We must manage it some day."

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE winter rains were fast giving way before the spring, and the muddy roads were drying in the sunshine. The Saracen bands began to scout along the hills again, and sometimes Roland caught a glimpse of armored figures that told him his people had ventured into the enemy's country.

A great deal went on in his head, these days, about the Crusades. When he first came to Palestine, he had taken it as a matter of course that the Franks would soon regain what they had lost, but, now that he knew Khaleel, he began to suspect it would not be so easy a matter.

"Do the Saleebi hold so much less of Palestine than they used to?" he asked Samson.

"Why, of course, little brother, didn't you know it? All they have now is the coast of Syria. The Saracens are masters of the rest of the land, and it's they who own the great stone castles that the Saleebiyin built all up and down the country."

"Castles! Have the Saleebiyin really built castles here?"

"All over Syria," Samson replied. "I've seen one of them myself, the one at Banias — they say that's the largest of them all. Then there's Kaukab-il-howa,[1] away up above the rest of the world,

[1] Star-of-the-Wind.

where you can look down on the Jordan or up at Hermon, and see everything east and west. That's the castle that held out against the Saracens a year and a half after all the others surrendered to them."

Roland was dismayed. He didn't know that matters were as bad as all this; and that Samson should speak of the Crusaders' losses so indifferently nettled him. He even felt a little resentment against Khaleel himself.

"Why is it so?" he demanded impatiently. "Why do the Crusaders let the Saracens drive them out?"

"Well, little brother," Samson said, sensing the boy's hurt pride, "it's my belief that this country isn't good for the Frangi. Everything here is strange to them; the climate for one thing, it saps their energy. But the Saracens are at home here; they know how to turn everything to their advantage; yet, if they were fighting in *your* country, beyond the sea, it would be the other way around."

Roland brightened. There was a grain of comfort in this explanation.

"And there are some splendid Saleebiyin," Samson continued, "as brave as any of the Saracens. There was one, now, who was the talk of all Syria, and we still tell stories about his daring deeds up in Acre, and right here around Jaffa."

"Who was he? What was his name?" The boy was eager enough now.

"His real name I couldn't say, but he was known

as the Lion Heart. He was as formidable as his name and he outwitted the Saracens again and again; but at night," Samson smiled, "after he had fought with them all day, he and Salah-ed-din [1] would lay aside their swords —"

"Who was Salah-ed-din?" Roland interrupted.

Samson looked at him in astonishment. "You haven't heard of him, the greatest Saracen of all? He's been dead now a good many years, but his name and his memory will never die. But, as I was telling you," he resumed, "at night, when the fighting was over, the two leaders, the Saleebi and the Saracen, would forget war and exchange visits in their tents."

"And what became of the brave Saleebi?"

"People said he went back to his own land across the sea" — Samson nodded toward the west — "and, not long afterward, Salah-ed-din died."

"If only the Lion Heart had stayed," Roland reflected regretfully, "we might have had Palestine now."

Samson volunteered no reply to this, and Roland sat staring into space, his imagination kindling with the thought of those brave days when the Crusaders had ridden victoriously up and down the land, and their scarlet crosses had gleamed fearlessly everywhere.

But it was to the castles that his thoughts came back, fascinated. Those massive structures planted,

[1] Saladin: literally, the Worthiness of the Faith.

like bits of France, all over Syria! A bold thought leaped suddenly to his mind: he would like to see them! Yes, even though they no longer flew the emblem of the Holy Wars.

"Samson," he demanded, "couldn't I see the castles?"

Samson considered. "I don't know why you shouldn't," he said slowly; then all at once his eyes lighted: "I'll tell you what! Some day we'll make a trip to one of them, you and I, little brother; would you like that?"

For some time Roland's fancy was busy with castles and battles, until one day he happened on something that was more engrossing than either the one or the other.

He was scrambling down a low cliff overhung with bush and brambles, when all at once he felt the mass of growth give under his feet. He let himself down a little farther, groping all the time for a foothold on the rock that he was sure lay behind the thicket, but it only yielded the more under his weight, and sank slowly back and in! In another minute he had parted the tangle and found himself peering into a small opening in the hillside. It was the mouth of a cave, so perfectly covered that one might pass it every day and never dream of its existence.

What a glorious place to hide in or to play robber! He crept farther in. It was much larger than he had thought from the small, low entrance, and

the sides rose high enough for any one to stand easily upright. One could be comfortable here for weeks, if one only had food enough!

Through the leafy screen he looked out over the hills and the plain. Why, he could see everything that happened or any one that approached for miles off while all the time no one would dream of his presence. The very thing! Here he could play gloriously at war, this his castle, and he its Crusader master! Here he would lie in wait for imaginary Saracens, watch their movements, and plan his attacks accordingly!

Just then he heard Samson call him. This was his chance! He would experiment a little!

"Roland," cried the shepherd again, "where are you?"

"Where are *you?*" mocked the boy. "I'm here, can't you see me?"

At this moment Samson came into view, only a few feet from the cave. His face had a puzzled expression.

"Samson!" the boy shouted. Samson started violently and looked all around. "Shut your eyes" — with a burst of laughter — "and when you open them I'll be standing by you!"

Samson did as he was told, and in another minute Roland had crept out from the bramble and was at his side.

"You scamp!" cried the shepherd. "Now I know where you were! In a cave, weren't you?"

"Almost at your elbow," and Samson was made to peer in at the dark opening. "Do you know, Samson, I could see ever so far, without being seen. Wouldn't it make a secret lookout, though!"

"Depend upon it," the shepherd assured him, "that's exactly what it has been many and many a time for Crusaders, and Saracens, too. Not only for them, either," he reflected. "My mother told me that these caves of the Shephelah have often been refuges for men who were hunted and persecuted for one reason or another, long before the Saleebiyin came here. I've seen some that have been dug out so as to make good-sized rooms, and even connected by passages that led back into the hillsides themselves. Oh, yes, men lived there — and died, I suppose — poor hunted creatures! For that matter," he ended, "my people often used caves for burying their dead."

Roland was fascinated with this story of men who had lived in caves, who had hidden themselves even as he had done, and even as he, had looked out over hill and plain to watch for their pursuers. Only they, poor souls, had been so terribly in earnest!

"How did they get their food, do you suppose, Samson?"

"Oh, they waited their chance to go out, and a good many of them, my mother told me, disguised themselves in the skins of beasts."

A light broke over Roland's face: "They must

have walked on all fours as I do when I play sheep!"

"Of course they must have," Samson rejoined. "I wonder that I never thought of it when I've seen you running alongside of Abou Kbeer!"

"Why couldn't I have a sheepskin to wear when I play sheep?" cried the boy. "I believe I could make Khaleel think I really *was* one — or any one else that came past and didn't know what I was doing!"

Samson was instantly as interested as Roland himself.

"I'm going to sell two or three of the flock, presently, and I'll flay one of them myself; then we'll be sure of a good pelt." He threw back his head suddenly and laughed: "Nothing like being a boy, is there, little brother? Let's see, now," he continued, "I'll sew the skin up, and leave an opening through which you can slip in and then fasten."

"I can't wait, Samson! When do you think it'll be ready?"

"Well, the flaying won't take long, but then we must dry it properly so it will be pliable and soft."

"Think of the first time the Chevalier sees a sheep running along behind you and wonders where *I* am!"

But when Roland next saw the Chevalier he was far from running sheep fashion or any other way.

One morning at the very end of the winter rains he woke up, hot and listless.

Samson studied him anxiously. "We'll stay near home to-day," he decided; "the sheep can find enough to eat near by."

"I'm not sick," the boy protested, but as the day wore on he grew more and more quiet and his face more flushed. "It seems as if I could drink all the water on the Shephelah," he said, after he had emptied the water skin that Samson had brought along, "and do you know, Samson, I keep thinking about snow. Somehow I can't get it out of my mind — just to plunge my head into it. But you don't have it here in Syria, do you?"

"Oh, yes, on the mountains; and sometimes I've seen the ground around Jerusalem quite white with it. And now," Samson announced briskly, "we're going home."

"Now? And the sun still so high?"

"We're going to cool that hot head of yours — you'll never guess what with," laughed Samson. "Come along, little brother!"

But for all his apparent good spirits he kept a watchful eye on the boy's listless face and lagging steps, and, just as they reached the hill that lay between them and the hut, he swung him up in his arms.

"I can walk, Samson! Besides, I'm too heavy."

"Tell that to Abou!" Samson laughed. "I've carried him, and he out-weighs you." And without slackening his pace he strode up the slope.

The sheep straggled along behind, but for once

he paid no attention to them, and went straight on to the hut. He laid the boy gently down on the sheepskins: "Now, for that hot head!"

Roland stretched himself out and closed his eyes. It was good, oh, so good, to be at last in the hut, at last on the soft fleeces! It seemed as if he could lie there forever.

Presently he felt something cool and moist on his forehead. He opened his eyes to find Samson bending over him. "What is it?" the boy asked.

"You'll never guess," declared Samson, "so I might as well tell you — it's leben!" [1]

"Not the leben that we eat?"

"The leben that we eat," the shepherd assured him; "there's nothing like it for a fever." He uncovered Roland's chest and laid over it a cloth spread with the white curd. "My mother cured me with it when I was sick once or twice."

In a few minutes Roland had dropped into a restless doze that was made up of confused dreams.

It seemed a long while afterward that something made him open his eyes. In the flickering light of the oil lamp he made out Khaleel and Samson at his side. Khaleel leaned forward at once and took the two hot hands in his strong, cool grasp.

"Man-child from the garden of Allah," he said, though his voice sounded very far away, "we're going to get something to make you better at once."

[1] The fermented milk of Syria.

He got up directly, and went outside, and once more Roland floated off into troubled sleep.

All at once he was conscious of Samson's voice, low, but quite distinct: "Perfect," he was saying; "not a thing amiss. They'll never suspect!"

What in the world did he mean? *Who* would never suspect *what?* Roland half turned his head to see whom Samson was speaking with, and straightway felt his heart bound into his throat; for there, in the uncertain play of light and shadow, stood a misshapen bowed old man, his head doubled on his chest, brown, wrinkled, blear-eyed — the peddler, unmistakably the ancient peddler! The next instant he had vanished through the doorway.

Roland stirred impatiently: another of those feverish dreams! When would they stop teasing him? That old peddler, now! He'd almost forgotten him and his mysterious disappearance after the ride up from Jaffa, and the unaccountable glance of amusement that had passed between him and Samson, when for a moment the dim eyes had flashed with vigor and youth.

Presently there swam before him a vision of leben, cool and thirst-quenching.

"Samson," he whispered, "couldn't I have a drink of leben?"

"The best thing you could ask for," Samson told him, while he held a bowl of it to his lips. "And now, little brother, you'll sleep.

Roland settled down contentedly; then he happened to remember the peddler.

"Oh, Samson, I mustn't forget to tell you — I dreamed the old peddler was here, and that you were talking to him —" He stopped as Samson's face flashed into sudden laughter, and eyed him suspiciously: "*Was* he here, or did I dream it?"

"I wonder now!" bantered Samson, and without another word he went out of doors, and Roland fell at last into sound sleep.

When he woke the gray of dawn was stealing into the hut. The fever was gone, and the ache from his bones. He turned over, expecting to see Samson stretched out on his sheepskins, but, instead, there he was, fully dressed, and with him some one that, even in the half light, Roland recognized at the first glance.

"Chevalier!" he cried. "You?" How had he got here, and where was Father Gaspard, the boy wanted to know in the same breath.

"Steady, now, lad, one question at a time," smiled the Crusader. "You aren't well yet."

"But how *did* you get here?" Roland insisted.

"Well, an old man came into camp late last night, and told me that Samson wanted me to come to you. So we started at once, and such a race as the beggar led me — by Heaven, I never saw such riding! Why, the wind would have had a task to keep up with him."

Roland looked at Samson inquiringly: "Who was it that you sent?"

Samson shrugged his shoulders: "Just one of the men about here," he said carelessly, "that I got to take my message."

"Couldn't Father Gaspard come?" Roland asked.

"Father Gaspard," replied the Crusader, "is away, but he'll be up here post-haste to see you as soon as he gets back to our camp and hears you've had a fit of fever."

As de Vaubois spoke, Roland studied his face. Somehow he was not quite his usual gay self. There was something constrained and guarded in his manner, as if he had a secret that he was afraid would be discovered. Could it be bad news of his father, Roland wondered, and at once he put the man to the test: "Is there word of my father, Chevalier?"

"None that I know of," the Crusader replied, and looked him so squarely in the eye that the boy knew he spoke the truth, "but we're asking for him everywhere. And, now, lad," dropping into his old tone of easy banter, "tell me what you've been doing with yourself, for I must have an account of you to render to Father Gaspard the moment he gets back."

Roland laughed. "Don't let him know that I've been sick; after all, what's the use? But tell him that I'm learning something new every day. I can use a sling, and I can run like a sheep — you should just see! Oh, but, Chevalier," the boy interrupted

himself, "best of all is the cave that I've found, so hidden that you'd never dream where it is, and I play it's a Crusader castle and that I'm its lord."

"Not another word, little brother!" Samson remonstrated. "At this rate we'll have that fever back in no time."

"Just one more thing, Chevalier! Samson says there was once a great Crusader here who did all sorts of wonderful things; he robbed a caravan once, and he beat the Saracens again and again, but at night he'd be friends with Saladin and visit him in his tent. Did *you* ever hear of him?"

"Ah," smiled the man, "who hasn't? Listen, Roland, he was no less a person than Richard the Lion Heart of England! Yes," he shook his head regretfully, "those were fine brave times. But the tide may yet turn for us — who can tell? Meanwhile," he got up briskly, "as long as you're mending, and I can assure Father Gaspard on that score, I'll be off. Mind you're on your feet the next time I come so you can show me that cave of yours!" And he was out of the door.

Now that he was alone, Roland suddenly realized that he felt very tired and weak and quite ready to be still. He could hear Samson and the Crusader talking in low tones, outside. Then, above the hum of their voices, de Vaubois's rose distinctly: "When he's well enough to know, send for us." There was an assent from Samson, and then, almost at once, the quick beat of hoofs as the Chevalier galloped away.

"'When he's well enough to know,'" Roland repeated uneasily to himself. *To know what?* They were keeping something from him! His suspicions had been right, after all. De Vaubois knew something that he wished to conceal. And it was only the uncomfortable consciousness that he had overheard what was not intended for his ears that kept Roland time and again, that day, from asking Samson what the Crusader's words meant. Over and over he pondered them, "When he's well enough to know, send for us," until out of sheer weariness his eyes closed in spite of himself.

When he waked he knew by the way the light slanted into the hut that it was afternoon. "Why, Samson," he called, "it's late!"

"Yes, you almost missed seeing a visitor who's brought you a present. See!"

"I promised you something that would make you better," said Khaleel's voice from the doorway.

"Khaleel!" cried the boy. "You, again?" He hesitated a moment; then, "*Were* you here in the night, or did I dream it?"

"I myself was here, man-child, and no sooner here than I must be gone. But I told you I'd get you something to make you better, and here it is." Khaleel laid a bundle down beside the boy and took off the heavy cloth wrappings. There, pure and white and cold, gleamed the snow for which Roland had longed!

"Oh! Khaleel!" He plunged a hand into it, took a delicious, dripping mouthful, and crunched it thirstily. Samson and Khaleel watched him delightedly.

"Where did it come from?" he asked at last.

"From the mountains north of us — Il Howa and I got it for you."

"Khaleel!" Roland seized the man's arm impulsively. "I love you, though you are a Saracen!"

"Ah," laughed Khaleel, "it's worth every flake of snow to hear that! And when I come again," he said, as he got up to go, "be sure that you're up to meet me!"

He had hardly reached the door when Roland called him back with a puzzled cry: "If *you* weren't a dream, then the peddler wasn't!"

The Saracen faced about and met the boy's gaze squarely. Was there a smile lurking in the luminous black eyes?

"He was here right after you were and you must have seen him," the boy challenged; then, changing his bold tone to a wheedling one, "Tell me, now, didn't you?"

"No," protested Khaleel, and his eyes fairly danced, "*I* didn't see him — but Samson did!"

Samson nodded.

"Tell him!" exclaimed Khaleel impetuously. "Tell the child — he has all but guessed — when I'm gone!"

So, after all, there *was* a mystery about the old

peddler, and Roland, on edge with curiosity, could hardly wait for Samson to solve it.

"It's quite a story," Samson began, "but the kernel of the nut is this: Khaleel himself is the old peddler!"

"*Khaleel?*" For a moment Roland was speechless; then, "But how can he make himself so old?"

"Well, he has ways of changing himself; some of them I know, and some of them only Khaleel himself knows. Listen, little brother," Samson continued, "the peddler disguise is just one of many that he uses. Sometimes he's a shepherd lad, sometimes a Bedawy [1] or a fellah,[2] or even an old gypsy woman! And he's so clever at it that often his own friends don't recognize him!"

"Why does he do it?"

"To keep the Saracens informed of all that goes on. In his disguises he can go anywhere and see and hear everything without being known; in fact, he's called 'The Eye and the Ear of the Saracens.' And the name fits him," Samson reflected, "for he rests neither day nor night. When he isn't scouring the country up and down, he is planning battles and attacks and defenses."

Roland's heart sank. No wonder the enemy was victorious, with such a mind at its head! No wonder that the Crusaders had set a price on the life of such a leader. He said as much to Samson.

"But that doesn't prevent him from going among

[1] Bedouin. [2] Peasant.

the Saleebiyin whenever he needs to find out what they're doing," Samson assured him. "You know, he was fairly jostling elbows with them the day you landed at Jaffa! He wanted to see what sort of a cargo the Frangi boat had brought."

"And that was what you and he were laughing at, wasn't it, that he should be in the midst of the Crusaders without their knowing it! Do you know, Samson," the boy went on quickly, "that I kept thinking of that look that you and Khaleel gave each other when you laughed! I couldn't understand how the peddler's old eyes could grow so young all at once!"

"I know, little brother; I could see from your face that you suspected something, and I told Khaleel so at the time. As for him," Samson declared decisively, "he liked you from the moment he saw you; he'll do anything for you."

Roland was silent for some moments; then, "How did he happen to come yesterday?" he inquired.

"I sent a message to him to Jerusalem by a shepherd lad who passed by here while you were asleep. I was so afraid he would be off, far away somewhere, but, by good fortune, his men found him quickly and he came straight here as soon as he got my word. 'You stay with the boy,' I told him, 'while I go to Jaffa and tell his friends he's ill.' But nothing of the kind would Khaleel have: '*You* stay,' he said, 'and *I'll* go, Il Howa and I, and

we'll bring the little lad's friends back with us — that will please him.'"

"I reminded him," Samson continued, "that he was tempting death, and I begged him not to go. But he just laughed and began to disguise himself, and he was off before I could get my wits together. Then, when he'd got the Chevalier here, he went straight on to get the snow that he knew you wanted."

"I love Khaleel!" the boy burst out, choking a little. "I love him — there's nothing I wouldn't do to prove it to him."

"He believes that already, little brother," Samson said heartily, "and now you must please him by getting well quickly."

Whether it was from Samson's leben or Khaleel's snow or the gladness of spring, it was a matter of only a few days before Roland had got back his strength and was out on the hills with the sheep. Sometimes he thought uneasily of the Chevalier's last words, but, as nothing had come of them, he had begun to believe that nothing would, when, early one morning, before the sheep were out of the fold, Father Gaspard and De Vaubois appeared riding toward the hut. Instantly the words he had overheard shot ominously into Roland's mind: "When he's well enough to know, send us word to come!" He glanced at Samson. Ah! *He* knew that the two men were bringing bad news, Roland could tell, by the look of distress in the dark eyes; and

as Father Gaspard rode nearer, the sight of his stricken face was the final proof that confirmed the boy's suspicion of coming disaster.

De Vaubois made a show of cheerfulness, but, without greeting him, Roland ran at once to the monk and looked anxiously at him:

"What is it, Father? Are you ill?"

"Not in body, child," he said, dismounting heavily, and steadying himself on the boy's shoulder.

"Then is it that my father —"

"No," Father Gaspard interrupted, "nothing of that sort."

"But something has gone wrong," Roland persisted. "I — I — heard the Chevalier tell Samson, the other day, to send for you when I was *well enough to know*. To know what, Father?"

Instantly Father Gaspard was all tenderness and solicitude: "My poor child! I'd have told you sooner if I'd known you had this hidden away in your heart. Yes," he went on sorrowfully, "something has gone wrong, unspeakably wrong! Some weeks ago, Roland, rumors began to float in to our camp about the Children's Crusade. Tell him, Chevalier," he turned to the Crusader, "how it came to your ears — you heard it before any of us."

"The news came up from Egypt," de Vaubois explained, "by peddlers and travelers; nothing definite at first, just vague reports that the children had been lost at sea in a fearful tempest near the Island of San Pietro."

"Lost? You mean drowned?" Roland demanded breathlessly.

"Yes. Then we heard that some of the ships had escaped from the storm and made their way to the African coast, where the poor children on board them were sold in the market-places of Egypt into slavery!"

"Sold!" Roland repeated in a bewildered way. "To whom?"

"To men, who became their masters, who own them just as they own horses and camels." Sorrow and anger struggled in Father Gaspard's voice. "But even that isn't the worst of it," he said, half to himself. "How are we to tell the rest of it?"

"If I could help it the boy should never hear it!" the Crusader brought out violently, and his eyes were so pitiless that Roland wondered how they could ever again be gay and kind.

"The long and the short of it is," he went on, "that some time ago a score or more of these children were brought up from Egypt by their masters into Palestine, and hurried through the country — they must have passed within a few miles of us — across Jordan, and the eastern desert, to Bagdad."

There was a sound of incredulous amazement from Roland. Father Gaspard dropped his face into his hands, and the Chevalier turned his head away. Samson's compassionate eyes never left the boy.

"At Bagdad," de Vaubois resumed in a choked

voice, "some of the poor innocents were sold again; and, on the others, the Saracens tried to force their religion. Heaven knows what tortures they used, but in spite of everything the children stood firm in their faith; and in the end" — the choked voice halted and sank low — "most of them were drowned or put to death."

In the silence that followed, Roland looked uncomprehendingly from one to another, and then, as the ghastly truth made its way into his stunned mind, he flung himself on the ground in an anguish of weeping.

The children he had marched with in the long procession that had wound through France! Why, some of them were no older than himself, and some were still younger; and yet, alone and unprotected, their tender bodies had gone down in the pitiless storm, or, even worse, had been herded like cattle in strange slave markets with no father and mother to stand between them and merciless men; no one to save them from the slavery that stretched, hard and loveless, through the rest of their lives.

But it was when he thought of that valiant little handful, hurried through the very country they had left their homes to save, past the sacred places they had dreamed of rescuing, only to meet torture and death, that it seemed as if his heart would burst. They must have cried out in their suffering — how could they have helped it? And mingled with that agonized sound, he seemed to hear still

another, the desolate weeping of the fathers and mothers in France who waited in vain for their children to come home.

"I can't bear it!" he cried, strangled with sobs. "It can't be so — it mustn't!" And he sprang up with a wild impulse to run somewhere, anywhere, to cool the fire in his head and his heart.

All at once his eyes fell on Father Gaspard — Father Gaspard so broken in spirit, so bereft of hope, that suddenly out of his own desolation Roland felt something warm and tender leap to life, the throbbing instinct to fling himself to the load that was crushing someone that he loved. In a minute he was at the monk's side, comforting him as he would a child.

"Ah, Roland, lad," Father Gaspard faltered, "you are still young; you may live to see victory, the Saracens conquered, Jerusalem won. But I, I am too old, I shall never enter the holy places. And now that our last hope in the Children Crusaders is gone, I must die, knowing only defeat."

"Father," Roland broke in, "the Children Crusaders aren't all gone — there's one here! And there wouldn't have been but for you! It was *you* who saved me, Father" — he sprang up in front of them all — "saved me to do a Crusader's work!"

"There's downright good sense in that," de Vaubois cried out warmly, "and a man's valor in the boy's words!"

"Enough to put me to shame, faint heart that I

am!" Father Gaspard took him up; then to Roland, "Child, you've found my courage and given it back to me, and strength to bear my part in our great cause. Heaven grant, lad" — he drew Roland down by him — "that I may turn that strength in full measure to the quest that brought you here!"

Roland caught at this mention of his father to turn the tragic subject: Do you know how Samson says we shall find my father, Robert Arnot? We must tell every one about him, travelers, camel-drivers, shepherds, villagers; and they will pass our story on, by word of mouth, so that finally the whole country will hear of him."

While the Chevalier and the shepherd talked over this plan, Roland sat close by Father Gaspard and amused him with the liveliest accounts of Abou Kbeer and their antics together; of his learning to use a sling and stones; of his play in the cave that he had stumbled on, and a hundred other incidents as well.

"He mustn't look lonely and sad again if I can help it," thought the boy to himself, and he remembered his own black time of despair when he would have died if it had not been for Father Gaspard's warmth of hope and comfort. So that, by the time the Chevalier gave the word to go, the monk was almost his old self, serene and cheerful, and, above all, hopeful.

"You've put new life into me, Roland, lad, I'm young again!" he said, smiling down at the boy.

As soon as they had ridden out of hearing, Roland turned anxiously to the shepherd: "Do you think Khaleel had anything to do with those poor children that were murdered at Bagdad?"

"Not one thing!" declared Samson solemnly. "Set your heart at rest. He never even knew of it until it was all over, so he assured me, when I told him the story that I had learned from the Chevalier the day you were ill. Those who took part in the crime concealed it from Khaleel because they knew he would never consent to it. If you had seen his grief and shame that such a thing should have been done by Saracens! Why," Samson ended, "Khaleel would have fallen on his own sword rather than let those innocents be victims of such hideous cruelty."

"I'm so glad, Samson!" cried Roland, as if a load had been lifted from him. "I couldn't have borne it to have him concerned in such a thing! Samson," the boy's face and voice became suddenly wistful, "the Chevalier told you about the Holy Children the day that I was ill, didn't he? You didn't know, but I overheard him ask you to send for him and Father Gaspard when I was better, and I was sure they had some bad news for me."

"Child, I've known it, all these days that you were getting back your strength, and the thought of what was before you has been like a knife at my heart."

That evening, when they had put the sheep in

the fold, Roland found himself thinking again and again of Father Gaspard and of how like his own courageous self he had been as he rode away. And somehow the memory of the smiling face, comforted back from its misery to its old faith and courage, seemed like some caressing warmth that shielded the boy from the cold horror of the Children Crusaders' tragic fate.

CHAPTER EIGHT

One afternoon Samson and Roland were hurrying the sheep homeward. A straying ewe had delayed them, and now, long after their usual time, they began to climb the last hill, when suddenly a sound of men's voices rang out on the stillness. They glanced hurriedly about, but could see no one until a sharp turn in the path brought into full view the valley below. There, in the lee of the hill, where they could look directly down on it, was an encampment, evidently in full swing of preparation for the night. The peaks of tents showed white in the dusk, horses whinnied restlessly, and everywhere men moved briskly about, men that even in the failing light Roland recognized instantly as Crusaders, far from their own coast camps, and in the enemy's country, but Crusaders for all that.

"Saleebiyin!" he whispered in his excitement. "Where can they have come from all at once?"

"Saleebiyin," Samson agreed, "and out of their own bounds!"

"There'll be a battle, Samson!"

"Battle or not, it means something that we'll hear from before many hours!"

"Hark!" said Roland as the voices floated up to them from the camp; "I believe I can hear what they say!"

"At which end will the sentries stand watch?" sang out some one in French.

"Sentries? Folly!" in derisive tones. "All that needs guarding is the boy's tent —" The words trailed off into laughter; then, "If *he* were to escape, there'd be all Christendom to pay!"

"Never fear, he'll not escape," was the instant retort, "and glad enough the infidels will be to get him back at any price, even though we make it Jerusalem!"

The speakers must have moved away, for, listen as he might, Roland could catch not another word.

"I couldn't make out what they were at, Samson," he said with a puzzled face. "Such a muddle! Not about a battle," he went on, "but about some one that mustn't escape from their camp, and for whom the 'infidels' will be glad to exchange Jerusalem!"

"Infidels means the Saracens," Samson answered thoughtfully. "Can it be that the Frangi have captured a Saracen and think to barter him for Jerusalem?"

"If I went down to the camp now, I might find out what they're here for," Roland proposed.

Samson laughed. "We'll keep to our side of the hill, little brother; as it is, it will be dark before we can turn the sheep into the fold."

"Do you think there'll be a battle?" persisted the boy.

"There will be *something*, and trouble for some one if I'm not mistaken."

"I'll find out from them to-morrow," was Roland's last word as he settled into drowsiness between his sheepskin covers.

It seemed a long time afterward that a silvery tinkle drifted across his sleep, a tinkle and a quick rasp, as of metal drawn over stone — Khaleel's signal! For it was his way to announce himself at night by striking his knife on the doorway. Again the tinkle and the rasp! The boy was on his feet now and at the door, to find Samson before him, slipping back the bolt. Silently the tall figure that waited outside stepped in, and, as silently, the door closed.

Something was the matter — Roland knew it before Khaleel spoke:

"There is trouble, Samson, black trouble."

"Your trouble is ours," Samson said quietly. "Tell us."

By the light of the tiny wick that floated in olive oil, Roland looked full into Khaleel's face. The change that he saw startled him, and he instinctively moved nearer, as if to protect him — Khaleel, who had always sprung to *his* help! The Saracen drew the boy close to him.

"Saleem has been taken — captured by — the — Saleebiyin." He brought the last word out roughly as if it were wrenched from him.

Roland felt himself grow cold and hot, and a

glance of comprehension flashed between him and Samson, but Samson only asked quietly:

"How in Heaven's name could such a thing have happened?"

Khaleel struck his clenched fist on the wall. "That is what I've asked myself a thousand times," he cried passionately. "How could it have happened? That I should be the ridicule of the Saleebiyin is humiliation in itself; but even that is nothing — nothing, to the safety of the boy." He made a visible effort to control himself, then, in his usual way, he said, "Saleem was with my men whom I myself had sent out to reconnoiter while I went north. This morning they met me to tell me that he had been captured by the Saleebiyin two days ago."

"But how was it, Khaleel," inquired Samson, "that the lad was singled out of a group of his own people and carried off before their eyes?"

"Not a man of them saw him taken! The fact is, that, as nothing unusual had happened and no Frangi had appeared, they all forgot caution and got somewhat separated. Suddenly, like a bolt out of the blue, one of them saw a party of Saleebiyin dash from behind a clump of trees hardly half a mile away, wheel almost at once, and ride furiously toward the coast. It all happened in a few moments, and my men never even saw Saleem captured; but of course the boy was in the midst of the Frangi when they rode off to the west."

"Your party was watched," remarked Samson.

"Yes. And Saleem was picked because he was my son, and the price set on my capture includes him."

"Do you trust all your men?" asked Samson quickly.

A look of intense pain and hurt pride clouded Khaleel's face, and his mouth hardened into a line as thin and terrible as his sword edge.

"My own men, yes," he said, with a deliberate emphasis that Roland remembered and understood only months afterward. "They made no resistance," he continued, with an effort, "lest the Saleebiyin, rather than surrender the boy, should kill him in cold blood."

"Kill him?" laughed Samson. "Not they!" He leaned forward and looked Khaleel confidently in the face: "What if I should tell you that only this hill lay between you and Saleem?"

"This hill between me and Saleem?" the Saracen repeated, as if he questioned his own hearing and Samson's reason.

"There's no doubt at all about it," Roland broke in excitedly, and without a moment's delay he told Khaleel of the camp he and Samson had seen that afternoon. "With my own ears I heard the Saleebiyin speak of the '*boy's tent*' and say they mustn't let him escape. And who could that be but Saleem?"

"But if they have him," Khaleel said, "why do

they linger here? Why not flee to their own stronghold with their prize?"

"As I make it," Samson replied slowly, "they dare to dally in the enemy's bounds because they know you won't strike while they have Saleem, and they're waiting to see what proposals for ransom you will make to them."

A quiver passed over Khaleel's face, but he said nothing, and Samson continued:

"The last thing the Saleebiyin will do is to harm Saleem; what would they gain by that? No" — he shook his head emphatically — "they got him at a great risk, only — *only*, mark my word — to sell him back for an equivalent price!"

A smothered cry broke from Khaleel, but Samson went on: "Jerusalem, say, to call it a bargain!"

"A bargain, is it?" Khaleel burst out, his eyes black slits between narrowed lids. "For the Saleebiyin to choose their end of it? By Allah and His own Prophet, it will be *I* who dictate the terms; this" — he grasped his sword hilt — "Il Howa and I!"

"No!" Roland sprang up and struck the sword from him. "Not you!" and before Khaleel could speak, "*I'm* going to get Saleem away from the Saleebiyin, the sheep and I, if Samson will help us!"

The men looked at each other helplessly. What wild notion possessed the lad? But much too absorbed to notice them, he ran to the wall where his sheepskin hung and took it down.

A glimmer of understanding suddenly lighted Samson's face. "How will you go about it, little brother?"

And Roland, a good deal excited and very much in earnest, but perfectly clear as to what he wanted to do, told his plan.

Disguised as a sheep, he would wander into the Crusader camp late at night as if he had strayed from the fold. Abou Kbeer must come, too. "I'll go along slowly, like this," he dropped on hands and feet, "and every once in a while I'll stop and browse." Here he pretended to nibble, took a few leisurely steps, and nibbled again.

Samson and Khaleel burst out laughing. The boy had caught, to the life, the way of an amiably grazing sheep, and the motions of his head to one side and the other, as he pulled at imaginary tufts of grass, were irresistible.

"It's perfect mimicry," cried Khaleel, "perfect! How do you do it? But" — he grew very grave — "it's too great a risk, lad; suppose you should be discovered. Why should you take such a chance for me?"

"That's just why I want to do it, because it is for you and for Saleem," Roland declared affectionately. "I haven't forgotten the snow you brought when I was sick, nor how you went into the Saleebi camp for me! Besides," he went on, "there isn't as much risk as you think; if I should be found out, I can run. Samson will tell you that; and in the

dark the Saleebiyin never could see to follow me over the rough ground."

"The boy can run like a gazelle," Samson assented, "and every rock and gully of this region is familiar to him."

"As soon as I've found Saleem," Roland continued, "Samson must drive some of the flock down into the camp, and somehow he must startle them into running, so that they'll scatter everywhere and make as much noise and disorder as possible. While all that is going on, I'll cut the ropes of Saleem's tent so that he can escape from under it, and then, under cover of all the confusion, we'll get away while Samson stays behind and gets the sheep together."

Samson laughed delightedly, but Khaleel still looked doubtful.

"And you, Khaleel," Roland ended, "must be waiting on your horse, between the camp and our hut, so that the moment you see us you can take Saleem and be off!"

"Wait!" broke in Samson. "I can do better than run all the sheep at once onto the Saleebiyin: I'll cut the flock in two up here at the fold and drive one part down behind Roland. Just as we reach the camp, I will scatter them in all directions among the tents. Meanwhile, Khaleel, you will start the rest along and run them down onto us in as mad a panic as you can goad them into!"

"But I have no knowledge of sheep, you know, Samson, and if they refused to be driven —"

"No need for shepherd skill here, Khaleel," Samson reassured him; "all you must do is to spur your horse on the flock and they will fly before you; and once they are within my reach, trust me! Then take up your post" — he considered for a second — "yes, in the shadow of the great boulder halfway up the hill, you remember, and wait for the boys."

"Our greatest difficulty," Khaleel said thoughtfully, "will be to get the sheep to the camp at the right moment, neither too early nor too late."

"Just so," agreed Samson; "but if our plans go amiss we must resort to our wits, and, whatever happens, both boys can run, and Roland can find the big boulder with his eyes closed. As for me and the sheep, we shall raise such a dust and make such a noise that the Frangi will be thinking of anything but Saleem, and won't miss him until he's in the saddle and away!"

"You were born a general!" declared Khaleel, laughing. "Now, how will you make sure where Saleem is," he asked Roland, "and how is he to know you in your sheepskin?"

"I've thought of that. Samson is to tell him! In the morning, we'll take the sheep to pasture by way of the camp and while I talk to the soldiers we'll find out in what tent Saleem is. By and by Samson must give a sheep call, and the Saleebiyin will be sure to want to hear another. In the calls, Samson —"

"Ah!" Samson interrupted, almost as excited

as Roland, "in the sheep calls I am to tell Saleem our plan!"

"Where does that fair head find such wisdom?" broke in Khaleel, moved out of his usual composure, but Samson, intent on the details of the plot, observed thoughtfully:

"We must be sure that none of the Saleebiyin know enough Arabic to understand what I say."

"I can find out how much they know when we first go to the camp," Roland said, "and while you call I can tell from their faces whether they suspect anything."

"And meanwhile I sit idle!" Khaleel moved uneasily.

"You must take yourself off!" Samson declared. "We have work before us, and until it's done your presence here is a danger. But to-morrow at midnight —" He paused significantly. "Now," he continued briskly, "let us be sure we understand each other." He ran over the main points of their plan: "You will be here at midnight; the boy will start, while I follow with part of the flock; at the first shout that I raise, you will drive the rest of the flock down toward us till you hear me cry Imshalla! *Imshalla* is the word, Khaleel. It will mean that all goes well, and that the boys are on the way to you. If, however, I call *Ya haram*,[1] as if I were unable to manage the sheep, you must remain concealed. You will know that

[1] Oh, too bad.

something has gone amiss, but trust me to find some other means for Saleem's —"

"In that case," Khaleel interrupted, "I myself will come down!"

"No such thing!" Samson put in forcibly. "You must make no move, but hold yourself ready to fly like the wind, perhaps with Saleem, perhaps alone. I shall find a way to tell you what you are to do."

Khaleel agreed to this reluctantly. It was hard to stand by while Samson and Roland acted!

"Remember, Samson," he said gravely, "if it comes to a risk of your life or Roland's —"

"As if you hadn't risked yours for me!" Roland broke in.

"And wouldn't again, a hundred times, for both of us!" Samson added.

In a moment Khaleel's arm was around the boy.

"You are next to Saleem in my heart, man-child, know that always. And between us" — he looked affectionately at Samson — "gratitude is a meager word."

"Between us it has always been give and take Khaleel!"

Samson and Roland stood in the doorway as the tall figure went off through the darkness, followed by Il Howa, the horse as noiseless as the man. Presently the two forms melted into the shadows; a few moments of silence, and then the light, quick sounds of flying hoofs.

CHAPTER NINE

EARLY the next morning Samson and Roland led the sheep up the hill that lay between their hut and the Crusader camp. From the top they looked down on the tents that, in the first sunlight, were so many peaks of dazzling white. Several Crusaders were sauntering about, and others were feeding the horses tethered near by. The temper of the camp was one of leisure sure of itself, and unafraid of raid or attack.

"They have the upper hand and they know it," Samson observed after he had surveyed the valley from end to end. "Now," he went on, "to find Saleem," and he began to head the sheep down the hill. The flock scattered to browse on the fresh herbage of the lower land, and the shepherd and the boy strolled easily along in their midst.

"There he is!" exclaimed Samson in a whisper. "Don't look just yet," he warned. "Keep your eyes on the sheep. Now — the third tent from this end."

In the entrance of the tent Samson indicated sat a lad with arms folded and eyes staring somberly into space; a lad whose every feature proclaimed him Khaleel's son, from the lithe body to the keen, thin face, and the daring poise of the head thrown back a little, as if in challenge. He seemed

entirely oblivious to everything around him, the camp itself and the two soldiers who guarded him, the browsing sheep and their shepherds.

"We must make some sort of excuse to go near him," Roland said; "we might offer to sell a sheep to the Saleebiyin."

He had hardly got the words out when a Crusader came out of a near-by tent. Roland hailed him at once.

The soldier looked up in surprise. "How do *you* come by that French — and by that fair hair?" he demanded.

Roland told his name frankly enough and explained how he had come to Palestine in search of his father, Robert Arnot.

"Robert Arnot!" the man repeated. "Aren't they looking for him in all our camps?"

"The very same," Roland assented.

The soldier glanced at Samson and the scattering flock: "And meanwhile you're here tending sheep?"

"Do you want to buy one for roasting?" the boy asked, changing the subject abruptly.

"Yes; have you one?"

"I'll ask." Then, "Samson," he called in Arabic, "come here! Have you a sheep for sale?"

Samson cast his eyes over the flock and appeared to consider, while Roland, with a "Good Day" now to this Crusader and now to that, gradually edged his way near Saleem.

Meantime Samson had made his choice: "Here is one I can let them have."

He picked out a well-fed plump animal, twisted his fingers into its woolly neck and pushed it forward.

By now Roland stood within a few feet of Saleem, but, apparently engrossed by the business in hand, had never so much as glanced his way. Then, as if the thought had just occurred to him, he asked the Crusaders if they wished the sheep killed and dressed. Before they could answer him, he turned and seemed to see Saleem for the first time.

"Who is that?" he demanded, staring hard at the boy.

There was a roar of amusement from the bystanders, and Saleem flushed angrily, for he guessed that they were talking of him.

"A rare bird that we snared the other day while we were hunting," bantered one of the Crusaders.

"No, but, really?"

"Well, if you insist, a Saracen!"

"But what do you want of him?" persisted Roland.

"Oh, he's a good exchange when we want to strike a bargain with his people."

"Just what Samson said," Roland thought to himself. "They're not going to harm him; he's too useful."

The sheep, by now, had spread out along the edge of the camp and several had even strayed among the tents. Samson turned hastily and called

to the stragglers. Now, no European can hear the calls of the Syrian shepherd to his flock without being impressed by their blending of musical trills and guttural sounds. Roland knew this, and, as he had predicted to Khaleel, the Saleebiyin would be sure to want Samson to repeat them.

"Holy Saints!" laughed one Crusader. "Let's look down his throat and see how he does that!"

"What does he say?" asked another. "Can you understand him, boy?"

Roland burst into laughter: "He's calling the sheep together, now. There are other calls, too — he'll give them for you," with a nod to the shepherd.

The great moment had come! Roland threw himself down on the ground, hands clasped under his head, one bare foot swinging idly in the air. From where he lay he could look full into Saleem's face. Samson sat down with the tolerant expression of one who is going to amuse children, and, like children, a knot of Crusaders near him leaned forward expectantly. He repeated the call as he had just given it; then again, this time choosing his own phrases. Roland's heart bounded into his throat as he distinguished the words, "*Listen, O prisoner! Listen well!*" He glanced toward Saleem. The dark eyes still stared stonily into space. With his thoughts far away, the boy had not even heard the warning that was meant for him only. The Crusaders had not understood, either: that much was perfectly certain.

Samson now gave another call, the one that told the sheep of peril and brought them huddling around him. It began with several sharp, short cries, "Come! Come! Come!" Keeping the same rhythm, he substituted "Hark! Hark! Hark!" Then, with marked emphasis, "*Hear, and listen for thy life, O prisoner!*"

Ah! Saleem had heard! A flicker of the thick black lashes, a startled turn of the head toward the shepherd!

"He mustn't show that he hears!" thought Roland, for it was certain that, had the Crusaders' eyes not been on Samson, they must have noticed their prisoner's change of expression.

But Samson had seen the danger, and instantly came his swift warning disguised in his cry to the sheep: "*Listen, but appear not to heed, or all will be lost!*"

Ah, that was better! The Saracen lad took the cue and again the black eyes stared moodily into space, again the contemptuous indifference settled over the keen face. Roland breathed freely.

Samson paused a moment, then broke into the calls that the Syrian shepherd uses at shearing-time. Once more came the words for Saleem: "*At midnight, to-night, deliverance will come! Your tent will open. Escape from under it and follow, as the wind, your deliverer!*"

There! It was all said now, and not a Crusader had understood; Roland from his post of observation could vouch for that.

Samson rose as if to go, but the Crusaders were still bent on amusement. "Give us another call," they begged like children. "Tell him to sing for us, Roland."

It was just the chance Samson wanted to repeat his instructions to make sure that Saleem should miss no detail, and, willing enough, he began one of the half-sad, half-gay melodies of Syria.

"*At midnight, at midnight, hold thyself ready. A sheep will browse about thy tent, even the tent thou sittest in now. That sheep, that sheep, is thy deliverer. The tent will fall. Escape!*"

At this point Roland could not for the life of him help looking full at Saleem. In the fraction of time that it takes to raise and lower one's eyelids, he saw the black eyes flash a signal of unmistakable understanding to Samson, and knew, as Samson did, that nothing more need be said: Saleem was prepared!

Roland yawned and stretched, then sprang up.

"I'm hungry," he remarked to the Crusaders, "and thirsty, too." And in Arabic, "Let's go on to the spring, Samson, and eat our lunch there."

It was only when they had got the sheep well past the camp that they dared to mention the mornings' work.

"Everything went even better than we hoped," Samson remarked at last.

"Did you see Saleem's face the first time he understood you, Samson? I was frightened!"

"Yes, I saw his face, and yours, too, little brother! I had to do something quickly, or between you two the Crusaders would have suspected us."

Late that afternoon, as they led the sheep back past the camp and up the hill, they saw Saleem where they had left him, in the doorway of the third tent from the end. Over a bed of live coals hung the sheep Samson had sold that morning, and around it stood several Crusaders. Every once in a while one of them turned the carcass with a long pointed stick. There would be a hiss of burning fat, a flare of smoky flame, and out over the camp, and even to Samson and Roland, floated the appetite-provoking odor of roasting meat.

"It makes me hungry," exclaimed Roland enviously.

Samson laughed. "A full stomach and swift legs never seek companionship," he said.

So it was only a bowl of leben and a loaf of wheat bread for supper that evening, and then, filled and satisfied, and just tired enough to sleep instantly, Roland lay down in his warm sheepskins.

Samson, stretched out on the floor near by, kept an alert ear for the first sound of Khaleel's approach. After some hours he stepped outside the hut. There was no moon, fortunately for them, he thought to himself; the stars, brilliant in their setting of velvet sky, gave light enough. He listened carefully for several moments; knelt with his ear to the ground. Yes! A faint rhythm of hoofs that

beat stronger and stronger, and presently, out of the shadows, a dark blot that shaped itself into a horse and his rider. Even at night there was no mistaking either of them, the lithe, fearless animal and the slender, powerful figure of the man with the daring poise of the head.

"You're in good time," greeted Samson, "it's scarcely midnight!"

Khaleel swung himself from the saddle and left the horse to crop at will.

"Tell me," whispered Khaleel, "have you seen Saleem? Is he safe?"

"Perfectly," Samson assured him, "and probably awake and waiting for us at this very moment!"

"Allah be praised!" Khaleel stepped into the hut and knelt quietly down by Roland.

The boy opened his eyes, looked at first unseeingly into the smiling face above him, then sat up wide awake.

"It's midnight," he exclaimed, "time to go!" And he sprang up from his covers.

Samson stood ready with the sheepskin.

"There's no need of your putting this on," he said, "until we have climbed the hill, but we'll get Abou at once."

The old ram was not in the least disturbed to be routed out so late at night, but looked about him with his usual cool impudence, nuzzled Roland playfully, and then fell in between him and Samson as they set off.

"Remember," Khaleel called softly, "that the three of us are here, Il Howa, my sword, and I!"

At the top of the hill Samson took a last look about.

"There's no one astir down there," he concluded finally; then, as he helped Roland to fasten the sheepskin, "I'm willing to wager the entire flock that there's not a Frangi of them who wouldn't swear you were Abou's brother! Now, off with you," with an affectionate little push, "and, whatever comes, remember you have your legs and your wits."

Down the slope went Roland and Abou while the boy began in good earnest to imitate the desultory way of a browsing sheep. Presently they had come to the tents, and still no sign of guard or sentry. But for all that, Roland knew that one person in that quiet camp was wide awake and waiting, listening, for him!

Around to one side of the first tent he went, nibbling and pulling at the grass; then on to the next one. Ah! He started back and just saved himself from stumbling over a soldier who lay asleep on the ground. To his dismay the man stirred uneasily and half roused himself. Roland's heart gave a great leap and began to beat unpleasantly fast.

"Only those silly sheep," muttered the man drowsily, as he saw Roland and Abou. He felt about for a stone to throw at them, then, evidently overcome with sleep, he settled heavily back.

Now the third tent! In leisurely fashion Roland worked his way round to it. No one to guard it and the flap wide open! Nearer and nearer he edged, until at the very entrance he looked at last full into it. It was empty, absolutely empty! Even in the starlight he could see that it was so.

A tumult of frightened thoughts raced through his mind. They had taken Saleem to another camp, miles away, perhaps. And Khaleel waiting for him a few yards up the hill! Samson would be here presently; even now a faint distant sound of many little hoofs reached him. They had started, were coming. What should he do, *what?*

Like a flash of light in the dark there came to him, all at once, Samson's last words: "Whatever happens, you have your wits." He steadied himself; his brain cleared, began to work. To make sure whether Saleem was, or was not in camp, was the first business in hand, he decided quickly, and on he went, keeping close to Abou for reassurance.

All at once a large dark object on the ground, a few yards beyond, startled the boy. He moved slowly toward it: two soldiers, fast asleep, stretched at length across the entrance of a tent, their swords beside them!

"Ah!" thought Roland, "you have some one to guard in that tent or you wouldn't be outside it with your swords!"

If he could only go near enough to look inside!

Hark! From within came the sound of uneasy breathing as if some one were disturbed by bad dreams; then a word or two between long-drawn sighs. Those muttered words! What was there about them to make the boy stand stock still, to strain his ears to catch every sound of the troubled voice? Again the low tones, and this time no doubt about their message: "I wait — for — the sheep!"

A Crusader camp and Crusader guards, but in their midst a Saracen lad who signaled for help in Arabic, Arabic that had become as familiar to Roland as his native French!

Not a moment too soon had Saleem made himself understood, for the sound of sheep's hoofs grew louder every moment.

And now the first cry from Samson: the signal for Khaleel to start his drive down the hill!

Quietly Roland circled round to the rear of the tent, and slipped a rope from its peg; then the next one. The tent slackened perceptibly.

On came the sheep, scattering here, there, everywhere, Samson in their midst gesticulating wildly, apparently distracted. The camp was waking; startled exclamations and questions ran from end to end. Saleem's guards rolled over heavily, leaped to their feet, looked about them; and in the second that they hesitated, dazed and confused, Roland lifted the loosened tent, and felt Saleem press through.

"Follow close and run low," Roland whispered,

and on the minute they were off, and into the very midst of the sheep.

A shout from the guards—Saleem's flight was discovered! No matter, Roland told himself; with the few moments' start they two could reach Samson, and, once there, they would take cover under the confusion and disorder that raged around him. All at once, directly between him and his goal, a dozen soldiers dashed forward, shouting the alarm and making distracted search. Roland, in his sheepskin, would get by them safely, but Saleem might attract their notice. Besides, lights now began to appear through the camp and soon there would be more.

And then, from the most unexpected quarter and in the very nick of time, came help, in the shape of no other than the wily Abou himself! These humans who rushed about without rhyme or reason were just so many unruly sheep that needed to be subdued. He would teach them their lesson! And, lowering his head, he charged furiously in among them.

Down went one, sprawling over the ground, and on top of him another that Abou caught between the legs.

"Curses on the horned demon!" grumbled one of the prostrate soldiers. "Look out for him, you!" he yelled as Abou made a dash for a third victim.

The man raised his leg and made as if to bring his foot down on the ram's head; but Abou, quick

as lightning, leaped up and in, met the blow in mid-air with a vicious toss of his seasoned horns, and sent him crashing heavily backward.

"The creature's mad! Get out of his way!" cried some one.

The alarm spread like wildfire. Men tripped over each other to give the ram a clear track, and for the moment they forgot Saleem; while Roland, from his shelter among the sheep, and almost bursting with laughter, knew that in this moment lay his chance.

"Come, now, Saleem, close by me," he whispered.

They could hear Samson's voice plainly, and even in the darkness Roland made out the tall figure as it ran here and there, brandishing the crook over the panic-stricken sheep.

Straight in among the huddling, scattering, bleating animals came the two boys; and at that very moment, down the hill, goaded on by Khaleel, charged the rest of the flock. Into the camp they dashed, full tilt. The uproar and confusion redoubled, the dust rose in clouds. It was glorious, Roland told himself! If only Saleem could keep his footing in this mass of frenzied woolly shapes, they would be out of danger and up the hill in no time.

First, though, Samson must be informed of their escape so far. The difficulty was to get to him, for he was everywhere at once, bounding now to one side, now to the other.

The Saracen lad was panting, but he kept steadily on his feet and still held his body low.

"Don't let the sheep knock you over," whispered Roland, "and stop when I stop."

In another moment they were up to Samson. Twice Roland butted hard against him, even called him softly by name; and Samson, still shouting, gesticulating, waving his arms and staff, heard and understood.

"*Imshalla*," rang out his signal to Khaleel that all was well; and Khaleel, in the shadow of the great boulder, murmured, "Allah is great!"

The shepherd now redoubled his efforts to cover the boys' final escape. Even his practiced eyes could hardly distinguish them from the sheep, but he knew the direction they must take, and in that direction he sprang. In and about he circled, striking right and left with his crook, but, as Roland knew, never touching a single sheep!

The camp itself boiled in frantic disorder. Their prize was gone! Men ran in and about the tents, in search of Saleem. Some even tried to break through the barricade of sheep and past Samson, but to get within a dozen feet of that fierce figure and its formidable staff was an unenviable business!

Bits of their talk floated out to Roland: "He can't be far away —" "No, hidden among the rocks or bushes — we'll get him as soon as it's light."

Meanwhile Roland trotted briskly along, easy in his mind now, for Saleem was close behind him,

and the hill just beyond. And now, at last, they were on its rough slopes, with the thyme sweet under their hurrying feet!

"Straighten up and take a rest!" Roland said to Saleem in a low voice, while he unfastened his sheepskin and stood up. The Saracen boy was a little taller than he, he noticed, and leaner, and about the head and shoulders there was the unmistakable look of Khaleel.

"I didn't know who you were," said Saleem as they went on, "until I heard you speak both Frangi and Arabic; then I knew you were the Saleebi boy that my father has told me about. I wish *I* could run as you do, like a sheep!" he ended admiringly.

"What made them change you to another tent?" asked Roland. "I looked for you where you sat this morning."

"Oh, they put me in a different one each night. I was afraid you wouldn't find me, so I pretended to talk in my sleep! But I saw you and the ram with the uneven horns when you first came into the camp."

"Do you know where we are going?"

Saleem shook his head, and Roland, without telling him, led the way straight up to the great boulder. The next minute Khaleel and Il Howa had sprung from its shadow, and were beside the boys.

There was a low cry from Saleem as the truth burst on him: "My father!" Then, with one swift motion, as if it were familiar to them both through

long practice, Khaleel bent down with outstretched hand and swung the boy up behind him.

For a second Roland felt Khaleel's hand on his head, heard him whisper, "My other son," and, as he afterward told Samson, "they were gone like a black wind!"

And now Samson himself was coming up the hill with his sheep marshaled about him like docile children; but not a word did he and Roland speak till they had barred the fold on the last woolly back. Then, "What should we have done without Abou, Samson?" Roland burst out — and the two rocked with laughter.

"Why, I believe he could have managed the whole affair alone, the rascal!" Samson got out finally. "The last I saw of him he was ploughing along through those soldiers as if they were so much earth — and how they ran before him!"

The next morning, while they were at their early breakfast, Roland had a sudden thought that sent the blood over him, hot and tingling.

"Samson," he said, in a startled voice, "I was working against the Crusaders all the time, against my own side! I never thought of it that way till now!"

"Why did you do it?" Samson asked him gravely

"Because I would do anything for Khaleel without stopping to think that we were on different sides. And I'd do it all over again to-night for him! But I'll tell you what," as he sprang up, "I'm

SWUNG THE BOY UP BESIDE HIM

going down now to the camp to tell them that I helped to get Saleem away from them."

"I'll go with you, little brother," Samson declared at once.

"No" — Roland was very emphatic — "it's between me and the Saleebiyin, Samson." He turned the matter over silently for a moment. "Somehow I couldn't feel right not to tell," he brought out at last.

Hurried preparations to break camp were in full swing when he got down the hill, and there was an air of dejection about the whole place. Off to one side, and just making ready to mount, was a man rather older than the rest. Thick-set, black-browed, with an unmistakable air of command about him, Roland picked him at once as the officer in charge.

"Who is that?" he demanded of the nearest soldier, to be quite sure of himself.

"The General," was the curt reply. "What do you want of him?"

But Roland, intent on catching the man before he should ride away, hurried on.

"Sir," he began — a little timidly, now that he had begun to think of what he was to tell —

There was an impatient movement of the broad shoulders, and the black brows drew together till they made one formidable line.

"Sir," the boy repeated, "I helped your prisoner, the Saracen, to escape last night."

The man looked at him in blank astonishment. "Why," he said finally, "weren't you here yesterday? Aren't you the son of the Crusader that Father Gaspard is trying to get track of?"

"Yes," Roland admitted, "my father is Robert Arnot. I came to Palestine to find him."

"And you say that you helped my prisoner to escape, *you?*" The General was as incredulous as he was amazed.

All at once a light broke over his puzzled face: "Were those cursed sheep and that shepherd your accomplices?" he demanded furiously.

It went through Roland's head, bewildered at this unexpected turn, that the best way to divert attention from Samson, as well as Khaleel, was to center it on himself.

"It was *I* who got the Saracen lad out of the tent," he replied hastily; and at once he went on to tell how he had learned to run with the sheep, and to wear the fleece, and how, at last, he had put the disguise to actual use.

"And you betrayed your own countrymen to their bitterest enemy?"

Roland's eyes flashed at the ugly word. "I don't know what you mean by *betray*," he flared back. "The boy's father is my friend — he has risked his life for me. Why, I'd do anything for him!"

The last trace of the General's composure vanished. "Prating of your heathen friendships in the face of war that's red with the blood of Christendom

— you young jackanapes, you! The son of a Crusader, and yet you — you" — in his rage he cast about for a contemptuous enough word — "*steal*," he brought out with biting emphasis — "steal the advantage from us and hand it to the enemy! By every saint in the calendar, yes" — he took a step toward Roland, and for the first time his anger hinted of physical force — "and by my own good word, if you were more than a mere child, and if you'd not come to me of your own accord, it would have gone hard with you. *Hard*, do you mind?"

In the full glare of the man's wrath the matter took on proportions that the boy had never dreamed of until now. He, nevertheless, stood the ground that he had taken from the first:

"He was my friend and in trouble — I'd do it over again for him!"

"Well" — the General shrugged his shoulders with contemptuous dismissal — "the matter is over and done with. But mind this: you've robbed us of the chance of a lifetime, and it will be many a day before you'll find its match to turn our way."

He looked all at once so dispirited and weary, and there was such a world of disappointment in his stern eyes, that Roland's heart melted.

"Believe me, sir," he cried out remorsefully, "I never meant to harm the Crusaders. And I'll never rest, sir, never" — he swallowed hard, fighting down an uncomfortable tightening at his throat

— "till I've given back as much as I've lost for them!"

In the warmth of his feeling he took a step nearer the General, but the man turned on his heel and swung himself onto his horse.

"Promises are easy to make — I'll believe yours when you've put them into deeds," he said curtly as he rode off.

CHAPTER TEN

SPRING came in a flare of warmth and color, and the Shephelah burst into many-colored bloom. No garden that Roland had ever seen could compare with this blaze of Syrian wild flowers. There were great velvety anemones, scarlet and purple; narcissus, sky-blue hyacinths, and masses of golden broom; cyclamens of crimson and rose or pure white that sprang from every nook and cranny, and found root even in the stone walls of the terraced vineyards. Everywhere was the smell of fresh-ploughed earth; everywhere the fragrance of the cream-white blossoms of the olive, and of the dots of buds on the grapevines — such tiny things that you had to search among the leaves to find them. On the plain and in the villages, almond trees flowered into pink-and-white sweetness, and the splendor of the pomegranate flamed in the hedges.

A different season, this, Roland reflected, from the spring of France, with its days of mist and rain, its half-reluctant sunshine and its delicate tints, that made one want to step slowly, to speak softly. But *this* country, Syria, ah, this *was* a brave land! No half-colors here, no gentle hesitation of sun or earth. Here was brilliance far-flung, widespread, generous and free! The scarlet anemones looked you gayly in the face, acres of them; there was golden

broom, and to spare, for the myriad of humming bees; and sweet thyme everywhere and always.

Wild flowers were not the only ones on the Shephelah, Roland found, for one unforgettable day, when Samson and he had made an errand to one of the villages, they came on a garden hedged with roses in full bloom.

For a moment he stood still, overcome with sharp memories; then, without a word, he ran to the hedge and buried his face in its blossoms. Presently he picked one, and, in unconscious imitation of his father, he began to turn its petals gently back. Samson watched him with puzzled eyes. Could this be the boy's first sight of these flowers, that he was so moved by their beauty?

"I haven't seen them for so long," Roland said at last, "and they reminded me so of home, Samson!"

Instantly Samson was all sympathetic attention; and, when he had listened to the story of the rose in the garden in France, how Roland's mother bore its name, and how his father had cherished the bloom for her sake, "Depend upon it, little brother," he assured the boy warmly, "you'll never lack for roses when the village people know why you love them."

And he was right, for, when word went round of the little Saleebi's fondness for the flowers, there came to be a tender-hearted rivalry among the women as to who had the finest ones ready for him.

Once, as Roland was drinking in the sweetness of the lovely things, a sudden misgiving cut sharply into his thoughts: would he ever again see his father caressing the pink petals? He looked up to meet Samson's affectionate, comprehending gaze fastened on him.

"We shall find him, little brother," he said, answering the boy's mind, "by word of mouth spread far and wide. Even the roses themselves may help us — who can tell?"

Spring ripened into summer with its high blue skies and its long days of unbroken sunshine. Never a drop of rain, Samson said, from winter to autumn. But there were heavy dews that made the gullies and hillsides wet and sweet in the early mornings; and a breeze that blew in from the sea freshened the warmest day.

The Shephelah was anything but quiet now, for no sooner were the spring ploughing and planting and pruning done with than the figs and grapes began to ripen, and people came every day to the vineyards to stay from morning till night. Everywhere you heard them laughing while they gathered the fruit, for this is the happiest of all Syria's seasons, one long joyous fête. One was welcome to eat as much and as long as he could; the more, the merrier! Such clusters of grapes to be had for the picking, tawny-amber, or green, or faintly rosy; and figs, purple, and dark red, and green, with as many different flavors as colors; though, as Samson

told Roland, the best of them all was the small green one tipped with a drop of honey and made just to fit one's mouth.

While the talking and laughing and eating went on, people had winter in mind, too, and toward the end of the season the women and children spread quantities of figs out to dry, against the time when green things would be gone.

Finally, the men made the ripest grapes into the dibs [1] that Roland liked above everything. There were days of filling shallow vats with the amber fruit, and more days of squeezing out the juice and of boiling it; of mysterious stirrings and beatings; and finally, the treacle itself in delicious golden perfection!

Summer ended at last in the gentle showers of autumn. Tender green sprang up over the dry hills, great cool-looking colchicums of purple and white, and short-stemmed saffron crocuses. It looked, Roland said to Samson, as if the earth had slipped, overnight, into a dress of green spangled with white moons and yellow stars.

People began to come now from the villages to harvest the olives, and the wheat and barley. The drivers on the threshing-floors were never too busy to make room for "the Frangi boy" on the sledge, if, indeed, he could have passed one without taking a turn or two on it! With a good running start he would land square on it, ride a few moments, roll

[1] Treacle.

off into the fragrant grain, then climb on again, until his clothes and his hair were so thick with stubble that the sledge driver declared he would pass for a wheatfield!

"Do you remember your first ride?" Samson asked him one day.

Didn't he, though! And the ride up from Jaffa, and the mysterious peddler who was mysterious no longer!

But for all the fun of the threshing-floors, it was the olive orchards that Roland liked better than anything on the Shephelah.

"Whenever I look for you," Samson declared one day, laughing, "I'm certain to find you among the olive trees."

"To be sure," Roland agreed, his arms around the trunk of the one nearest him. "Do you know, Samson, I love them better than any other tree I ever saw. They seem like friends, somehow!"

"They give us a good deal, little brother, don't they? Food and light and fuel!"

"Yes; and then the way they spread out their branches, as if they wanted to make it easy for us to climb into them and play!"

Samson laughed. "That's what the flowers think, too — see!" He pointed to some cyclamen seedlings and bluebells that had lodged in the gnarled trunk.

"In Syria," he went on, "we say that the grandfather takes his grandchildren on his knee!"

One day Rasheed appeared among the olive-pickers, and Samson declared that for a full hour by the sun the two boys did nothing but compare their respective heights and breadths, their growth during the year, their swiftness in climbing trees, and their skill in using slings.

"One thing I haven't forgotten," Rasheed remarked to Roland after a while, "and that is to tell everybody I see about your father."

"Good!" cried Samson, overhearing him. "That's a seed that may bear fruit one of these days."

"Yes," continued the boy, "every one around here knows that Roland has come to find his father, and every one passes the story on."

To Roland's amazement, Khaleel declared his intention to follow Rasheed's example and to inquire everywhere for Robert Arnot.

"Why not?" said Samson, surprised in his turn. "Do you think Khaleel wouldn't do a great deal for you? Why, he loves you!" he ended, as if loving decided everything.

It was the same with Khaleel himself: "There's more than Saleebi and Saracen between you and me, man-child!"

"But one of these days, Khaleel," said the boy wistfully, "when I'm a real Saleebi and we meet in battle —"

Khaleel wouldn't let him go on. "When we reach that river we'll ford it," he laughed; then, more seriously, "Yet whatever Allah wills must be!"

It was an endless puzzle to Roland, these different ideas of God, and he could never quite settle it. The same One must be over all, he reasoned, and yet the Christ in whose name the Crusaders fought was different enough from the Allah on whom Khaleel called, the Allah of the glowing desert who ranged himself on the side of the swift Saracen bands whose keen blades marked a thin bright edge between life and death!

Between Khaleel's flying visits, and glimpses now and again of Father Gaspard, and errands every once in a while to the little villages busy with their autumn oil-pressing and dibs-making, there came days when Samson and Roland were left to themselves. Then Samson would say, "We'll have my people for company, to-day, little brother!"

And that was what the boy liked better than anything, to hear about Samson's nation which had lived long ago when Roland's had been not at all, and there was no France.

They were so real to Samson, these heroes of his, that he told of them as if he had known them always, talked with them yesterday or, for that matter, to-day. And so, to Roland, the Shephelah, with its sunny hills, its fragrance of wild thyme, its warmth, and its gayety of color, became a world in which lived again a great people and its great deeds; men of the out-of-doors, who had known, and put to their use, storms and sunshine, desert and brook, mountain and cave.

His favorite story was that of a boy who tended his father's sheep, as, by an old custom, it fell to the youngest son to do. Out in the open this lad, David of Bethlehem, grew up straight and alert, afraid of nothing, and as able with his shepherd's crook as he was ready with his sling. The great out-of-doors was his world; he loved to listen to its voices, to heed its moods, and to put them into the music of his harp: the quiver of the breeze among the reeds, the purling of the brook, the song of birds at dawn, the laughter and talking in the vineyards and orchards. Ah, he must have been worth knowing, that David of the ruddy cheeks and powerful arms and skillful fingers, and a king — when he came, at last, to be king — to whom any one might well be proud to be subject.

And yet Roland could hardly understand how a ruler could be chosen from the common people, especially any one who had lived the rough, hardy life to which David had been brought up. How carefully, now, the sovereigns of France were reared in their palaces, with hundreds of servants to spare them the least physical effort. Why, a king who used his hands for work at which he earned a living was unthinkable!

He said something of what was in his mind to Samson, who, in his turn, looked puzzled enough.

"But the Jews were an out-of-doors, working people, and if their ruler hadn't known what labor was, how could he have understood their lives, or

have known what they were about? And so how could he have really *ruled* them?"

This was a new view of matters to Roland, and a little disconcerting.

"Do you think," Samson continued, "that I'd obey a man who couldn't handle a sling or a crook, or a threshing-sledge or a plough, especially if he despised me because I could and did? It was because David had lived like his people that he was able to lead them, and to defend them. In fact," he ended, "I always thought he felt a good deal toward them as he had toward his sheep."

In this same familiar fashion Samson spoke, one day, of David's intimacy with every nook and cranny of the country, and how he had turned it to account against invading armies.

"Take the ravines of Judæa," he said, warming to his subject, "as much like rough rock steps as anything, and then picture to yourself the Philistine plainsmen panting clumsily up them — single file, for lack of room — while David and his men, wiry and agile as goats, hid in the bush on top and waited for just the right moment to spring!"

At Samson's happy contempt for the unlucky Philistines Roland laughed outright. "You talk about them as if they were boys trying to outdo each other!"

Samson laughed, too. "Well, I often have thought boys could have a glorious time at just that sort of play."

"Couldn't they, though!" Roland agreed heartily. Then, as Samson's picture laid vivid hold of him, an idea flashed into his mind: He and Samson in the rôle of David and the Philistines!

"Of course!" cried Samson. "We'll look for the right sort of ravine now!"

In the course of a day they found it, rather small, to be sure, but steep and narrow enough to answer their purpose, and rimmed by thorn bushes and rocks. Halfway in its course it forked sharply, and ran, two-headed, into the hillside.

"See, Samson," Roland pointed out, "it's even better than we planned! The one that defends the hilltop will never know which of the two forks the enemy will choose!"

To this Samson had something else to add, and that was a small circle of stones above the ravines to represent a fort. To make the ascent undiscovered, reach the fort, and take one of the stones, constituted victory unqualified for the enemy. If he were detected while still in the stony bottom, it was an out-and-out defeat, and he must begin over; but let him so much as gain the head of either ravine, and the defender must pay the penalty of a handicap in the final race for the fort.

Once, when the day had ended with this king of games, Roland asked Samson if all the Jewish leaders had been shepherds.

"Some of them, and certainly the greatest of our kings."

"*You* should have been a king, Samson!" cried the boy warmly — this dear Samson to whom he would like to give back his country and his scattered people, and then crown him leader of all!

"Why, I *am*," cried Samson gayly. "Who disputes my title? Look at these sheep, now: were there ever more loyal subjects?" Then, with a turn to practical matters, "Come, little brother! How would ripe olives be for supper, with fresh cheese and some of this thyme?"

But when they got home he declared his appetite would rival Esau's, and that nothing but lentil pottage would satisfy it. At which Roland, for the hundredth time, protested his sympathy for Esau, who, for this savory dish, had sold his birthright of eldest son. Pottage, when one was hungry! Ah, who could resist that on any account?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"Hic de Virgine Maria Jesus Christus natus est."

For months Saleem's escape was the talk of the Frankish camps. Some of the Crusaders frowned at Roland's part in it, some laughed, and a few defended him warmly. De Vaubois was one of these, though he never lost a chance to prod him about it.

One day he came on the boy out on the hills and hailed him with a wave of the hand: "I didn't know but I'd find you running on all fours!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Roland suspiciously.

"What indeed!" returned de Vaubois airily; "I was only thinking I might learn to do it myself — against *time of need*," with mischievous emphasis.

"You never will have done with that!" Roland retorted a little resentfully.

"I never will have done regretting that I didn't witness it — Samson and that big ram of his, and you in your sheepskin!" De Vaubois broke off to laugh uproariously; and Roland, at the recollection of Abou Kbeer's part, laughed, too.

"May Heaven forgive me," the Crusader burst out, "but if I had been a boy, and in your place — well —!" The next minute his face hardened. "But keep it always in mind, lad, that we Frangi are here to stand *together* under the Cross. Some

day," with an earnestness that left Roland pondering, "it may lead where your heart shudders to follow. Know where you stand *then*, boy! And so" — he dropped into his usual tone — "this friend of yours turns out to be no other than our arch-enemy, the great Khaleel! Tell me," he said curiously, "do you see him often?"

"Oh, Chevalier!" Roland broke in beseechingly, "don't ask me anything about Khaleel! Don't you see? I can't help but know a good deal about him, and yet he never once asked me not to tell the Crusaders about him, though it's no secret how much they want him."

"Bless your loyalty, boy! I won't mention the Saracen again, only, of course, one can't help but be curious about such a clever devil. I vow," he chuckled boyishly, "I'd risk anything to get a good look at him!"

Roland barely managed a sober face when he thought how near de Vaubois had been to Khaleel, the hours he had ridden by his side, and the actual words they had exchanged.

Presently the man himself turned the subject. "I really came to see you about Father Gaspard, Roland."

Instantly the boy was all affectionate solicitude: "He's not ill?"

"No, well enough bodily, but a good deal troubled in his mind. The fact is that Father Constante, and others, wish him to return to France to

urge men to join the Holy Wars. He's willing enough to try, but the thing that keeps him from going at once —"

"I know," Roland put in, "the promise he made my mother!"

"That's it exactly, and the old man is always speaking of it to me."

"He's done all any one can to help find my father," Roland declared warmly, "and there's nothing more we can do, Samson says, but to keep on telling every one about him. You must say that to Father Gaspard from me, Chevalier, and that I beg him to go back to France in the service of the Cross."

"There's something else that troubles him," continued de Vaubois. "He can scarcely bear the thought of returning without a sight of the shrines of the Holy Land. He speaks of the Holy Sepulchre [1] at Jerusalem, but it's Bethlehem that's oftenest on his lips. 'To end my days without so much as a glimpse of the sacred spot where our Lord was born!' he mourns continually."

"Chevalier!" For a moment Roland was silent, thinking hard. "I believe," he said at last, "that Father Gaspard *can* see Bethlehem — I'm sure he can."

The Crusader scrutinized the boy's face. "What have you in mind, now?"

[1] Where Christ's burial and resurrection are said to have taken place, whose possession was the object of the Crusades.

"Be on the watch for a message from me," Roland replied, evading the question, "sometime in the next few days; and Chevalier" — he looked de Vaubois squarely in the eye — "you'll keep it a secret, won't you, you and Father Gaspard?"

So the matter was left, and a few days later the boy took Khaleel himself into his confidence.

"If you knew how much he wants to see Bethlehem, Khaleel, and the place where our Lord was born!" he said, unconsciously quoting de Vaubois.

Khaleel nodded comprehendingly. "The Church with the Sacred Caves[1] under it — yes, I know. Of course your friend shall see it," he declared heartily. "I'll take him myself. The old priest, isn't he, who didn't want Samson to have you that day at Jaffa?" He smiled at the recollection; then, "You'll go with us, of course, manchild?"

Of course Roland would go! To see Bethlehem with Khaleel as guide was a chance that didn't come too often in a lifetime.

So, one day, when a Syrian lad delivered to Father Gaspard this mysterious message, "What you most wish awaits you at the hut of Samson Il Yahoodi, to-morrow, at nightfall," the priest at once sought out de Vaubois.

"Shall I go?" he demanded, excited as a boy.

"Shall you go?" laughed the Crusader. "Of course, go. Samson's name is a guarantee for fair

[1] Church of the Nativity.

dealing, you know that. As for what the message means, let Roland tell you! But, Father" — he lowered his tone and became serious — "not a breath of this to any one; I know enough of it to be sure that an indiscreet word would bring disaster."

The Chevalier's warning was borne out by Roland himself, for, when Father Gaspard, divided between boyish love of adventure and a half-fearful curiosity, reached the hut, the first greeting that he heard was:

"The finest news in the world for you, Father! But you must promise to keep it a secret, to ask no questions, and never to mention what's going to happen presently. You see, it's a matter of honor, sir," Roland went on earnestly, "and even of life and death."

And, when Father Gaspard had assented, "You're to see Bethlehem to-night," the boy announced triumphantly. "There!"

"Bethlehem? But Bethlehem is held by the Saracens!"

"Nevertheless, you're going there with one of them for guide!"

Father Gaspard looked doubtful. "No matter how much I want to see the birthplace of our Lord," he demurred, "I wouldn't compromise with my faith — and if a Saracen is to take us —" Then, quite unable to contain himself any longer, he burst out, "What have *we* to do with Saracens?"

Before Roland could reply, Samson, who guessed from the priest's face his fear and suspicion, stepped forward and smiled full at him, and then nodded as if to say, "All is right! Do trust us!"

The day was won! Father Gaspard's misgivings vanished, and his face broke into sunshine. "It's a pact, my boy! Agreed!" And the matter once settled, no one could have been more eager to be off. "Bethlehem! Blessed, blessed day when I behold thee!" he whispered rapturously to himself.

Presently, over the brow of the hill, there appeared a mounted Saracen with two riderless horses. Roland saw instantly that the horseman was not Khaleel.

"It's Ahmed," Samson remarked in a low voice aside, "Khaleel's most trusted companion."

"But Khaleel said he himself would take us," the boy insisted.

"Something has happened, you may be sure, to prevent his coming," Samson replied slowly. Then a light broke over his face. "I know," he chuckled, "you're to have *two* guides, little brother, — you'll see — so that Father Gaspard will never know *which* is Khaleel!"

Ahmed's serious polite salaam over, the little party set off at once toward the Judæan highland that loomed, black and level, against the eastern sky. Father Gaspard eyed the Saracen with a devouring curiosity that made Roland almost burst with amusement. It was plain that the good soul

could hardly keep to his word to ask no questions.

"And so you know them, these infidels?" he ventured; then, afraid that he had trodden on forbidden ground, he changed the subject hastily. "Roland, lad, the Chevalier told you of Father Constante's wish, that I should return to France?"

"And so you should, sir!" the boy said heartily. "Do go, Father," he urged; "no harm will come to me with Samson. As for my father, why, every one is helping me to find him, even" — he broke off abruptly, for he had almost said "even Khaleel" — "all my friends," he ended. "But, Father," he went on, "I may never again see my father; he may have fallen in battle. I must be ready for that. And if he *is* — dead" — he hesitated over the hard word — "his son should take his place!"

Now, as a matter of fact, Roland had always expected, sometime, when he was older, to join the Crusades; sometime, in the vague future. But the memorable talk with the General after the rescue of Saleem, together with what de Vaubois had said at their last meeting, had set him to thinking. And now, something in the way that Father Gaspard bore himself, his unconscious forgetfulness of himself in his devotion to the great Cause, cleared the situation for the boy: he was old enough *now* to serve the Cross!

Father Gaspard, riding close to him, was amazed at the look of manly decision on his face.

"Why," he said to himself, "the lad is no longer a child, but a youth, with manhood close at hand." Then, aloud, "Never shall I hear a more joyful word, Roland, boy, worthy of Robert Arnot and worthy of our common cause. Heaven be praised!"

"Father," Roland said quietly, "I haven't forgotten that I am one of the Children Crusaders!"

"Bless you, boy!" cried the priest fervently, "though not so much of a *child*, after all! Let's see, now, you're fourteen?"

"And on the way to fifteen. That's old enough to be a Crusader."

For a moment the two were silent; then Roland said, with that new resolution that had surprised the priest, "I'll go to some coast camp, Father. There will be something for me to do."

What Father Gaspard replied was lost on him, for a sudden familiar sound of rhythmic hoofbeats caught his ear, and, as he turned to look behind him, he saw that Khaleel, unmistakable even by starlight, had silently taken Ahmed's place. Samson's prediction had been right!

"Did you know me?" inquired Khaleel, a few moments later, laughing quietly as he rode alongside of Roland.

"As if any one else ever sat a horse like you, or any other horse stepped like Il Howa!" Then, glancing at Father Gaspard, "He's so happy at the thought of Bethlehem, Khaleel!"

"We shan't be so long getting there," Khaleel replied, "once we are out of the wadis."[1]

The path they took was as rough as it was varied. Now it followed the stony bottom of a valley, or climbed a hillside, doubled on itself around the edges of a ravine, only to repeat its twists and turns again and again. But at last they were on level ground, with a sense of being high above the rest of the world. Then a few miles along a traveled way, and presently Khaleel was pointing out a ridge topped by flat-roofed houses white in the starlight.

Roland translated the glad news for Father Gaspard: "Bethlehem! The city of David, Father!"

"And of a Greater than David," the priest answered, hardly above a whisper, as if it were too sacred a thought to say aloud; then, as he looked about the quiet upland, "Somewhere, here, the shepherds lay when the angels sang the news of the Holy Child!"

As they turned into the village, he halted long enough to dismount. "I couldn't ride over this holy ground, lad," he said humbly to Roland. And so, leading his horse, he went forward with bowed head.

Through the dark streets of close-set, thick-walled houses, Khaleel led the way into a silent, empty square, and stopped at last before a gloomy, formidable building. Instantly, and as if by magic,

[1] Ravines.

a door opened in the heavy wall, and a shaft of light streamed out into the night. There was a bewildered moment of quick dismounting, of passing single file and with bent heads through the low, narrow doorway; and then, half blind with the sudden light, and dizzy with the long ride and the thrill of the place and hour, Father Gaspard and Roland found themselves between the massive pillars and bare walls of the Church of St. Mary, with Khaleel smiling down at them.

"Tell the Father," he said to Roland, "that we go first to the Sacred Cave, the birthplace of your Messiah. Stay there as long as you will, no one shall disturb you; and, after you have looked your fill, come up here into the church. When you are ready to go, strike three times on the door by which we entered."

He walked quickly ahead to the farther end of the nave, and through a door cut in a stone wall that stretched across the church. As he followed, Roland recognized in the dim light an altar, and was reminded instantly of the one in the little church at home.

"But why the wall, Khaleel," he inquired, "to cut off the altar from the rest of the Church?"

The black eyes gleamed with boyish amusement. "If you must have the truth, man-child," he half apologized, "it was put there by the Saleebiyin, when they were having their turn here — against a possible Saracen attack!"

"Did you know that, Father?" Roland asked as he translated Khaleel's story in French.

"Some years ago," Father Gaspard said quietly; "from a returned pilgrim. He drew me a plan of the church, too, and of the Sacred Caves below. See," he broke off, "that must be where we are going now." For Khaleel had turned down a narrow stairway to one side of the altar, and presently they stood in an underground cave half vault, half room.

"Stay as long as you will," Khaleel repeated. "You are my guests!" And with that he vanished up the narrow stairs.

Father Gaspard, pale with emotion, had fallen on his knees, his lips moving in adoration.

"Ah, Roland, boy," he said at last, "in all that Holy Life the moments I love best are those when He blessed little children, and when He Himself lay here" — he looked lovingly about the rough chamber — "a tiny, lovely child in the arms of his mother, Mary!"

There were other caves, near by, into which the two found their way, and in one of them, Father Gaspard said, the great Jerome, scholar and saint, had made his famous translation of the Bible,[1] that was used now by the whole Christian world.

"And now, here," the priest continued, as they went up from the Sacred Caves into the Church, "here, where we stand, was written one of the noblest chapters of the Holy Wars. Find courage

[1] The Vulgate.

in the learning of it, lad, even as I do in the telling."

His eyes traveled meditatively the length of the nave, and fixed at last on the stone wall at its end, the wall built when Frankish might was in its flower.

"Such a day as it was!" he began, a little unsteadily. "A hundred years ago, and Christmas Day, at that! Rank upon rank of Crusaders seasoned by battle and adventure; lords and bishops ablaze with gold and jewels; even the native Christians of Bethlehem, awed and happy; and everywhere, on breast and banner, scarlet, the brave scarlet of the Cross!

"For this, you must know, lad, is a coronation and a triumph in one: A triumph for the Armies of the Cross, and the crowning of Palestine's first Christian king, Baldwin of Flanders. The crown is placed on his head" — one might almost have thought that an eye-witness was speaking — "and he is proclaimed King of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. And then! From every Crusader of high degree and low, flooding nave and aisle with its ringing music, bursts our ancient battle-cry, 'God wills it! God wills it!' So, for almost a hundred years — a hundred glorious years — Crusader kings ruled Palestine, and over its length and breadth waved the Cross, victorious!"

The old man stood staring into the shadowy aisles, as if, beyond their gloom, he saw the ranks

of armored figures; then, in an agony of appeal, he flung his arms up. "Once again, O blessed Son of blessed Mary," he implored, "once more, grant victory to Thine armies of the Cross!"

And Roland, hardly knowing that he himself spoke, cried softly under his breath, "Dieu le volt! Dieu le volt!"

"Let us go, lad, remembering it so," Father Gaspard said quickly, and the boy, his eyes full of the splendid bygone Christmas Day, struck three times, as Khaleel had told him, on the low, narrow door.

It was cool morning outside, and Bethlehem had begun to stir. House doors opened and women came out, jar on head, bound for the fountain. Men were already in the vineyards.

"This time," Khaleel said, "we'll travel as the sun does, in a straight line, because we must race with him!"

And, as good as his word, he led the way due west, off the road more often than not, across fields and orchards, with short cuts from one winding valley to the next. Just so, Roland said to himself, David hurried down to his famous encounter with the Philistine giant.

When the last steep turn brought the Shephelah into view, Roland, for the life of him, could not go on, but must stop to devour its bright hills with hungry eyes. It had always seemed to him made for a boy. Shepherds might pasture their flocks in

its hollows, and villagers harvest its grain fields and olive orchards, but above all, oh, mightily above all, a boy might play there!

Khaleel and Father Gaspard had ridden ahead, but they turned round at his voice.

"I can't stay so far from it," he called, laughing; "I must feel it under my feet," and he slipped from his horse to the ground. He stood there a moment, then bowed low. "Marhaba, O Shephelah!" — Syria's most serious, most grave and tender salutation: "Hail, O Shephelah!"

At first sight of Samson, he started toward him with a shout:

"Samson! We walked where David, *your* King, walked, and I saw the place where one of *my* kings was crowned! But the best of it is" — he took a long breath of the pungent air —"getting back!"

Samson laughed delightedly. "I know! Like a drink of cold water when one is parched."

Meanwhile Khaleel had turned the horses toward the east and Roland ran to him for a last word. Father Gaspard watched the two, his face alight with the rapt look that had come to it in the Sacred Cave.

"Tell the Saracen for me, lad," he said gently, "that he has made the dream of an old man come true!"

CHAPTER TWELVE

For the next few days Roland turned over and over in his mind the matter of joining the Crusader forces. His first step, he concluded, must depend upon the counsel of Father Gaspard and of the Chevalier. One or the other of them would come up from the coast presently to see him, and meanwhile he would say nothing to Samson of what was to come.

But the thought of it all filled the boy's heart to bursting. To leave the Shephelah that he loved from every curve of its sunny hills to the bees that hummed over its wild thyme; never again to water the sheep nor to run with Abou; above all, to leave Samson, the best beloved, was something that he could hardly face. Sometimes at night he woke with the same feeling of desolation that he had when his mother had died. Yet, on the whole, there was a sort of sober exhilaration in his new decision, and always the banner of the Crusades seemed to float before his eyes, a silent summons to fill the place that Robert Arnot had left empty.

Then, at a moment's notice, without so much as a word of ceremony or preparation, the call to service came, and Roland stepped into the ranks of those who followed the great red Cross.

One afternoon Samson had gone ahead with the

main flock to the watering-troughs while Roland and Abou Kbeer, at the rear, brought the stragglers into line, when, all at once, the boy heard his name spoken. He stopped short and listened. No, only a trick of his imagination, for there was not a soul in sight.

"Roland!" There! Again! No fancy at all.

"The cave, boy, the cave," went on the voice impatiently.

To be sure! He knew it now for de Vaubois's, and that it came, moreover, from the hillside cave.

"Look the other way," commanded the Chevalier. "By all the Saints, don't excite suspicion!"

"What do you want me to do?" demanded the boy, thoroughly bewildered.

"Come here at dusk — the very moment, lad. Go along now, and never a word, mind, to any one."

The Chevalier was very much in earnest and evidently under a great strain, so, with the assurance that he would be at the cave with the first sign of dusk, Roland ran on with Abou.

Something important was afoot, no doubt about that, and, as soon as the sheep were watered and driven up to the fold, he said quietly: "I'm going off for a little, Samson; perhaps I'll get some pebbles for my sling." But at the question in Samson's eyes, he added, "I can't tell you why, now, but don't fear for me. I'll be back soon."

He made his way noiselessly down the hillside, his ears alert for the least sound, his eyes now on the

shadowy gullies, now on the sharp-cut sky-line. Then, a last swift glance around, and he had flattened himself against the hill, squirmed behind the bramble overhang, and was in the cave.

"Heaven and the Saints be praised that you're here," whispered some one fervently, and Roland made out de Vaubois waiting patiently in the gloom.

"I haven't been long, have I?"

"Not really, but, if you'd waited here for twelve hours and put out your eyes trying to look through that mess of thorns—"

"Twelve hours!" Roland broke in. "Why, that's since early this morning."

"Just so," agreed the Chevalier. "I started afoot from the coast in the night, and how I got here I don't know. I bent myself double most of the way, I groveled among bushes and boulders so that no one would see me, and, to crown it all, I was in a panic lest daylight should come on before I could find this cave and get under cover."

"But, Chevalier," protested Roland, "you've been riding up here openly enough. What's happened?"

De Vaubois went on as if he had not heard the question: "It seemed as if you never *would* get within earshot! I've seen you and Samson on and off all day, but you were always too far away. If you hadn't happened to wander up here, I meant to make a break for your hut when it was dark, risk

or —" He stopped short; then in the same low whisper he went impetuously on: "Listen, lad," — he seized Roland's wrists — "the Saleebiyin need you! Will you help us?"

Roland's heart leaped within him. To be needed, to be of service to his countrymen, to have the chance to prove his loyalty to the Cause!

"Tell me how," he said breathlessly.

"By doing an errand for us, Roland, a most serious, most important errand. We thought of you because you speak Arabic like the natives, and you can go anywhere in this country and pass as one of them, except" — de Vaubois paused doubtfully — "except, perhaps, for your fair hair."

"Oh, that!" exclaimed the boy. "Why, I can stain it, or cut it off — a dozen things! Go on, Chevalier."

With Khaleel for pattern, the matter of disguise was the last to trouble him.

"We want you," said the Chevalier, going straight to the point, "to take a message to the commandant at Kaiserieh."[1] His murmur sank to a mere whisper: "Lean forward, boy, let me speak in your ear — so!"

There followed a brief explanation. The situation, it seemed, was this: The Franks had decided, by combining their resources, to strike a desperate blow for their lost possessions. It had been agreed that the forces at Kaiserieh and at Jaffa should

[1] Cæsarea.

meet halfway between those two places and march inland together, prepared to launch an aggressive campaign. But, within the last two days, the Chevalier said, scouts had reported the lower spurs of the Shephelah, and even parts of the plain, alive with hostile bands. There was no doubt that somehow or other the Saracens had got wind of the Crusaders' plans, and were preparing to checkmate them. Nothing would be gained now by a massed advance, and the commandant at Jaffa had decided that the Kaiserieh camp must remain quiet for the present while he sent his men in small companies here and there to draw the enemy out and to dissipate their strength.

As soon as the Saracens had been sufficiently scattered, the Crusader armies must seize and press their advantage. For this the Kaiserieh forces must save themselves; must be ready at a signal to join the Jaffa camp in the final attempt. Everything depended, now, not only on warning Kaiserieh *in time* of the change in plan, but on taking the instructions with the utmost secrecy, for let the Saracens suspect that messages were passing between the Frankish camps, and at once they would be on their guard for a new move. A Crusader, therefore, in the *regular* service — de Vaubois emphasized his words — could hardly perform this errand without being recognized and, so, frustrating its purpose.

Roland nodded comprehendingly. It was clear

enough now that a place had opened in the ranks that could be filled by just one, and he the son of Robert Arnot.

"When?" he asked quietly.

"Three nights from now," de Vaubois replied with a grasp on Roland's shoulder that made him wince, "Kaiserieh must know!"

He searched the boy's eyes, his own somber with the challenge. "Three nights from now," he went on, "at latest; for, with the following dawn, acting on the first plan, and ignorant of recent developments, they march inland — to sure defeat. Just you, lad, between them and it."

"Three days and nights," Roland meditated aloud, "is time and to spare. I've never been to Kaiserieh, but as for the distance —" He shrugged his shoulders as if he disposed of that consideration with the gesture.

"Then," said de Vaubois, "I'll tell you the lay of the land." And, as good as his word, he went over the details of the ground to be covered.

"Half a day or so, before you reach Kaiserieh," he ended, "you'll come to a hill, and from there, if you've made no wrong turns, you'll see, ahead of you, a thread of green that's a ravine grown up with oleanders; beyond that, oak thickets, olive and mulberry orchards, and a scattering of little villages; then a road, and Kaiserieh is just beyond, to the west, with the smell of the sea to guide you!"

"It's as clear as daylight," the boy assured him. "Listen, now," and he repeated word for word de Vaubois's instructions. "Don't be uneasy, Chevalier. In three nights from now, the commandant at Kaiserieh shall know the message — you may tell your commandant at Jaffa so, and Father Gaspard, too."

"Father Gaspard?" the Chevalier stammered. "Why, didn't you know? — I forgot to tell you — Father Gaspard has sailed, lad, for Genoa and Marseilles!"

And he told of the monk's sudden decision to ship with a merchant packet a fortnight or more ago.

"I wish with all my heart I could have seen him again," the boy said sorrowfully. "Though, after all," he thought to himself, "what better good-bye could there have been than the sight of Bethlehem together!" Aloud, he asked solicitously, "How are you yourself going to get back to Jaffa, Chevalier?"

"As I came," whispered the Crusader. "Don't fear for me — I was born under a lucky star!"

"Then I'm off, and all good fortune to you!"

"Multiply that a hundred fold, my boy, and you have my wish for you!"

Roland found Samson waiting for him outside the hut. In the two years that they had been together, this was the first secret between them!

"I'm so sorry, Samson! I can't tell you where I've been, nor where I'm going."

"Going?" cried Samson in dismay. "Now?"

"It's something that I must do for my country," was all Roland could say. "I'll be gone five days, at least, perhaps longer; and Samson," he added meaningly, "it's just as well not to know where I am — in case you're asked!"

"But, little brother, what will you do for food and drink?" protested Samson anxiously, and, as if the thought of losing the boy were intolerable, "I'll go with you!" he cried.

"Indeed, you mustn't! No, Samson, trust me; I'll be back with you soon. What are you afraid of? I can take care of myself anywhere, for you've taught me! I must be off," Roland ended, "early in the morning while it's dark."

When the time came, Samson slipped a loaf of bread filled with olives into the boy's girdle.

"If any trouble comes, little brother, you know how to send me a messenger, and I'll be on the way to you before he has turned round to go back!"

Roland swung along quickly over the familiar turns, past the nearest village, and then straight for a certain stream where he knew that walnut trees grew. For walnuts he must have the first thing, he thought to himself, and before it was too light.

At the edge of the water he sat down, took out his knife and sharpened it on a stone. Then, lock by lock, he cut off his hair until only a short bristly growth was left. He ran his hands over it.

Yes, that was short enough, and it was fairly even, too. The next step wasn't so easy, Roland reflected. He gathered a quantity of the nuts, placed them on a large flat rock, and crushed them with a stone until the thick rinds were pulp. Then he covered his hands and arms and legs with the juicy mass and rubbed it in vigorously. Good! That would do! More rinds, more pounding, and this time it was the face and neck and the close-cropped head that came in for their share of the dark juice. Finally he leaned over the placid water and scrutinized his reflection. But for his blue eyes he might have passed for one of those wandering Bedouins that he had seen once or twice!

Now for some bread and olives, and then, he was off again, over the last hilly breaks of the Shephelah and on to the plain that stretched away to the sea and the Crusader camps. Always he bore to the northwest as de Vaubois had told him, and always he kept his eyes and ears open for news of the Saracens. Twice he met a string of loaded mules heading toward Damascus, and more than once he saw at a distance the flying Saracen bands. One evening, when he stopped to drink at a fountain, a woman who was filling her jars inquired indifferently where he came from and he pointed east to the Shephelah villages; and from her casual glance and her natural air he knew that she didn't see behind the walnut stain!

At last, late on the third afternoon, he recognized

the hill that the Chevalier had mentioned. He hadn't missed his way; of that he was certain, for the landscape lay before him as de Vaubois had described it. There, even, was the blue glint of distant sea, and near it, he calculated, must be the great camp, athrob with the bustle of preparation that he must stop — he!

For a moment he gave himself up to a vision of the horses, the gleaming armor, the men, rank upon rank; men of his mother tongue, of his motherland!

Unconsciously he squared his shoulders and took a deep breath, while he reckoned the rest of his journey by hours rather than by distance, as one does in Syria: over this open ground to the wooded growth beyond; then that space broken into patches of gray and green that marked olives from mulberries; and after that — Kaiserieh! Four hours would do it easily, allowing even for a delay if he should lose the way.

Beyond him ran the ravine that de Vaubois had said looked like a thread of green. Perhaps there would be a tiny gleam of water at the bottom, and, to a certainty, shade and coolness in which, he told himself, he could make better time than up here in the glare and heat.

He found that the gorge began prosaically enough in a shallow depression, then, as if weary of the sun, it plunged steeply into cool depths by a series of rocky steps. Over these fell a slender

stream that gave never a moment's peace to the overhanging ferns and vines from its dash and spatter.

For only a breath of freshness Roland stopped above the swaying fronds and silver spray; then, holding on by trees and bushes, he let himself down the steep sides, his hands sticky with the oleander blossoms that he clutched in his swift scramble.

Just ahead of him, a huge boulder almost blocked the narrow gorge, and tumbled about it was a helter-skelter of rocks and sticks and fallen tree-trunks; but it was his fancy not to let a single obstacle slow the brisk pace he had set for himself, so on he went, his feet as alert as his head. Leaping from stone to stone, with never a moment's hesitation in which to lose his balance, he came abreast of the boulder, cleared it at a bound and stood on the other side of it — face to face with a squad of Saracen soldiers! They had evidently watched his coming, for there was not a sign of surprise on the grave faces.

"You are far from home, my son," one of them said kindly. "Where is Samson?"

Instantly Roland recognized Ahmed, the horseman who had ridden part way to Bethlehem with him and Father Gaspard, even as Ahmed had known him in spite of cropped head and stained face.

"Samson?" Roland replied with a show of indifference that he was far from feeling. "Oh, up

yonder," with a careless gesture; "I'm going to him presently."

Was it imagination, or did Ahmed's eyes narrow a trifle, his lips tighten imperceptibly?

"Yes," he agreed courteously, "that's where you'd best be, by all means, with Samson. One of my men shall go with you to see that you reach him in safety."

That was all, but Roland knew now how he and Ahmed stood, and that the reply held a two-edged meaning. He needed no further proof that the Saracen was here to watch the movements of the Crusaders, and that he meant to take no risks of any kind. The boy could hardly restrain a laugh, alarmed and disconcerted though he was, at the disarming adroitness which reduced him, at a stroke, to uselessness. As he stood there, casting about desperately for some way to evade Ahmed's proposition and at the same time to allay his suspicion, a half-whispered murmur from some one in the band reached his ears: "The Frangi boy who saved Saleem!"

His first impulse was to see who had spoken, but he checked it, and continued to look here and there with a casual air as if he had not heard the remark.

All at once his attention was caught by two men who were standing a little apart from the rest. The taller of them was watching Ahmed with a look of almost idiotic joy, as if an opportunity that he had long waited for had at last come. The other was a

figure that made Roland shiver in spite of himself. He was an Oriental, the boy decided, though neither Syrian nor Saracen. But whatever his nationality, there was no doubt about his origin in the very depths and dregs of evil — evil that leered from his half-closed eyes and writhed in his twisted lips.

Involuntarily the boy shrank back a little from the snake-like face, but the next moment Ahmed began to speak and Roland forgot everything else but the words which sealed the doom of his errand to Kaiserieh.

"Take the lad back now," Ahmed was saying kindly, but with unmistakable significance, to the soldier nearest him, "and leave him only when you have seen him safe with the shepherd."

Before there was chance for a reply, the Saracen whom Roland had noticed stepped forward and saluted Ahmed. His face had lost its look of crazed delight, and was quite stolid, almost stupid.

"Ya seedi,"[1] he said, "as our orders are to let no one pass this line in any direction after nightfall" — he glanced at the deepening shadows — "should not the lad remain here till daylight?"

That the man had some rank which gave him the right to question his superior, one saw from his dress and bearing; and, in spite of his deferential tone, one felt that he intended to exercise his privilege to the full. But whatever purpose was

[1] My master.

behind his words, they were the sweetest music Roland had ever heard, for, give him only the chance to stay here, and he would risk all his hopes of salvation on finding some way to escape to Kaiserieh.

Ahmed made no reply and, for a moment, appeared to consider. In his grave, kind eyes Roland saw a baffled look, and then, though it was hardly perceptible, the boy could have sworn that there was a little stir among the half-dozen men who stood nearest to Ahmed and that they moved closer to him.

"So be it, Haroun," he said at last. "The lad shall stay."

Instantly Roland was aware that the assent had been given only because there was some reason for not coming to open issue with Haroun; while at the same time a mysterious instinct told him that the Saracen party was divided: Ahmed and the men about him, against Haroun and the rest — including the strange Oriental! He had not so much as uttered a syllable, but it leaped into Roland's mind all at once that it was *he* who had silently willed the words into Haroun's tongue, words that thwarted Ahmed, and, wittingly or not, cleared the way for the Chevalier's message to the Saleebi camp at Kaiserieh!

Before the boy could collect himself in the face of these bewildering undercurrents of hostility and cross-purposes, there was a general move down

the ravine, and toward the level ground above. Roland followed, with Haroun just ahead, while Ahmed and his men brought up the rear.

All at once Ahmed stumbled and pitched violently forward against Roland, sending him sprawling on the ground. In the confusion that followed he felt his arm seized and heard Ahmed whisper in his ear: "Have no fear of them, lad, but don't trust them. They are trying to turn the soldiers against Khaleel — he will be here at dawn!"

So his suspicions were right! The Saracen band was shot through with intrigue — no less real because it was undeclared — aimed, not at Ahmed, as he had at first thought, but at the army's head.

A thousand conflicting emotions tore at the boy. He felt like a deserter, a traitor. A plot against Khaleel, while he, whom Khaleel had never failed, left Ahmed and his faithful few to defend their leader's honor as best they might; for that he himself would somehow make his way to Kaiserieh by daybreak Roland never doubted for a moment.

He was so absorbed by his troubled reflections that he hardly noticed nor cared where the Saracens were taking him, but, as they came out onto open ground and preparations for the night were started, it dawned on him that this was one of their observation posts. By day they hid in the gorge, by night they camped above it, and from either place any move from the plain or the coast could hardly elude

them. It was as de Vaubois had said, the Frankish attack was suspected.

"Here, Saleebi, eat!" Some one thrust a loaf of bread into his hands, and, as he munched it, he looked about him to reckon his chances for escape. The soldiers, for the most part, had lain down on the ground, some of them already asleep. Ahmed and his men sat a little apart from the rest. Some one of the band, Roland knew, would be chosen soon to watch while the others slept. Who would it be, he wondered impatiently. Where would he take up his post, and how soon?

Meanwhile, it was quite clear to him that Haroun was keeping a vigilant eye on him, and, on one pretext or another, was preventing him from going near Ahmed. What did the man want of him? he wondered uneasily. He must have some reason for detaining him in the camp.

Presently Haroun ordered him to lie down and go to sleep, and then flung himself on the ground within arm's length. It was hardly a minute later that Roland felt rather than saw that some one had joined them, and through half-closed eyelids he made out the Oriental sitting beside Haroun. The arch-rebel of them all, the boy told himself, with his snake-like eyes and his twisted mouth! These two, then, whom he had suspected all along of being in league, were to be his guards, his evil hosts with whom he must reckon this night, outwit, and escape.

He found himself wondering over and over why they had wanted to keep him here. Then he brought himself up with a round turn: he must rid himself of these useless questionings and begin at once to contrive a way out of his trap.

Presently a plan took shape in his mind, and, acting on it, he began to whimper and sob like a homesick child. There was a sound of disapproval from Haroun, followed by an impatient foot. Roland only cried the more piteously and raised himself as if to ease his insulted leg, but really to see how matters stood for the night. When he lay down again, he had found out what he wished to make sure of, that out of the entire band only these two stood watch.

Gradually his pretended tears quieted. His breath came in long, gasping sobs, finally grew deep and regular; and, to all appearances, he slept at last, the image of a relaxed, tired child.

"See!" One of the watchers leaned over him and raised his arm. Instantly it dropped like lead, and the boy, acting his part, stirred a little, moaned, and slept again.

"He'll not wake now, he's too tired," whispered the same voice, with a yawn, and Roland knew that so far, at least, his ruse had succeeded.

The two men began to talk in low tones: "The sooner we turn him loose" — Roland recognized Haroun's voice — "the sooner can he get to the Saleebiyin — depend upon it that's where he was

bound — and the more quickly can we spread the rumor that Khaleel is using him for a go-between with them. As for Ahmed, every one will believe that he set the boy free, *by Khaleel's orders*, to take his messages to the Saleebiyin."

"Turn him loose," some one broke in, "and the truth would run loose with him and be our undoing. He's sure, sooner or later, to hear of what we charge Khaleel with, and once it reached his ears he'd stop at nothing — you remember what he did for Saleem — even if he had to bring the Saracen army and the Frankish face to face to prove Saleem's father innocent!"

There was a grim chuckle and a pause, while Roland, as yet only dimly understanding this scheme to smirch Khaleel's honor through him, strained his ears to catch every word. The second voice must belong, he knew, to the man with the snake eyes and the evil mouth. It had a sibilant quality that made one think uneasily of something that crept stealthily in slime; but, over and above that, was the actual pronunciation of the words. Where had he heard Arabic spoken like that? All at once he remembered: Samson had, one day, described the Egyptian dialect, with its softened gutturals, and then had mimicked it, to Roland's vast amusement. That was it, then; this man with the strange, swarthy face, this hatcher of plots, who now kept watch of him, was an Egyptian. The soft-gutturaled tones went on:

"A blow or two to silence him is our surest plan — and then the old well to hold him safe. He'll tell no tales there" — with a derisive laugh — "and meanwhile we can say that Ahmed has let him go to do Khaleel's bargaining with the Saleebiyin. His friends will give up looking for him in a few days, and he'll be forgotten — and we shall be free to say what we like without him to disagree with us!"

Roland shuddered. This was the reason they had thwarted Ahmed's plan of sending him back to Samson! This was what they wanted of him: to use him against Khaleel! He knew now that it was one of these two who had identified him before the Saracen soldiers as "the Frangi boy who had saved Saleem," with the express intention of focusing the suspicion of the band on his friendship for Khaleel.

"The boy out of the way" — the hissing voice sank too low to be distinct; but at intervals Roland caught, "Once we've got the army against Khaleel — the end of his power — and then *we!*"

The whispers ceased, and Roland, dizzy with horror, tried to steady himself enough to think what he must do, how find a way out of this web of death and dishonor. His own destruction! Khaleel's downthrow! Khaleel to be accused of playing the traitor with Saracens and Franks, of using him as his confederate! And Ahmed — who had suspected these intriguers, but not half of their evil, or he would never have left him to them, Roland re-

flected — he, too, must meet disaster in the cold-blooded plan.

It came over the boy sickeningly that when his chance to break loose should come — and he had never let himself think that it would not — Haroun and the Egyptian would lose no time in pointing out Ahmed as the accomplice who had set him free to carry Khaleel's traitor overtures to the Crusaders. Knowing this, how could he go? Yet, to stay meant almost certain death. But suppose by staying he could outwit these ruffians, somehow expose them to Ahmed and get word to Khaleel — for Khaleel would be here at dawn — *even though it meant a few hours' delay in delivering his message to Kaiserieh* —

Back and forth went his mind in agonized debate with himself, when, all at once, there flashed into it something that the Chevalier had once said: "Some day the Cross may lead where your heart shudders to follow. Know where you stand *then*, lad!"

At the time he had wondered what the words meant. He knew now!

It must be Kaiserieh first and beyond all question! For the while he must forget everything but his errand, fix all his energies of mind and body on it. But that accomplished, back here on the wings of the wind; back here to Ahmed and Khaleel!

Meanwhile the night crept steadily forward, fewer and fewer grew the hours before dawn. For

some time now the two guards had said nothing. All at once, "See if he still sleeps soundly," one of them whispered.

Roland felt a hand laid on his shoulder, then the breath from the face that peered into his. There was a murmur of satisfaction as the man listened to the perfect imitation of a tired child's breathing.

"Yes; he'll not wake!"

"He won't need to! He'll never know what happened to him!" was the brutal rejoinder, and Roland felt his blood run cold.

"No need to get rid of him till midnight or after," the voice continued; "I'll lie down for a little, and then we'll make quick work of it."

"Ah!" Roland exulted to himself, "may all the Saints above send sleep upon you!"

Presently, as he lay there, every sense taut, a peculiar odor filled his nostrils, an odor of animals, something like that of a flock of sheep, only much stronger, more penetrating.

"Hm-m," murmured the Egyptian, "a caravan passes!"

At the moment the remark meant nothing to Roland, *only that it brought no response from Haroun.* Then a yawn, an unmistakable yawn, followed by a slight stir as of a body that stretched itself along the ground! A few moments passed and Roland lifted his eyelids a hair's breadth. Yes! Both men had succumbed! And now — deep

regular breathing that grew even a trifle noisy with the sleepers' complete abandon!

"If they are ready," thought the boy gleefully, "I am!" With that, he turned noiselessly on his back, to his right side, and again on his face. Another turn, another and another! Still, all quiet. Over and over he rolled until several yards of solid ground lay between him and the Saracens.

One quick look at the sky to be sure that the bright northern star was over his right shoulder, and he was on hands and feet, sheep fashion. Abou Kbeer's ways would stand him in stead here as they had in his first adventure! A few yards more, and Roland straightened up to his full height. It was only a matter now of keeping his course straight west.

On he went, sometimes at a half run, always at a good pace, and steadily the distance grew between him and his guards. It could hardly be more than midnight, and a few hours would see his errand done. The thought sent his blood leaping.

Two hours went by; more than halfway to the end, and soon he must come to the road the Chevalier said led to the Crusader camp. Hark, though! What was that sound, like faint, rhythmic blows? Instantly he had his ear to the ground. There it was, a soft, regular thud, thud, thud. Horses' hoofs! Beyond a doubt, riders who searched for him; Ahmed, perhaps, or the Egyptian and Haroun.

Forward he sped with the wildest energy he had

ever exerted. There was a chance that he could evade capture if he lay flat on the ground, for it was still dark. But if there were several scouring the country and bent on finding him — The hoofs again, and nearer; no denying it! A confused terror seized him, his whole body felt numb.

"You mustn't fail now, not so near the goal," he pleaded with himself.

If only he could find a shelter of some sort, a bush, a tree. And then something from the depths of his panting, desperate self whispered, "The caravan!" Ah! those loaded animals — they were his chance — if he could reach them in time.

The sounds behind him were distinct now, and it was clear enough that they were made by several horses. Suddenly the camel smell filled his nostrils and at almost the same instant his feet struck hard bare earth. The road, the blessed road, the traveled way that caravans must tread! But the thunder of hoofs close upon him! His legs seemed turned to wood, and his heart to a wild thing that tore at his breast. Would he never overtake the camels? Had he somehow missed them? And then all at once he was upon them, a dim line of the patient beasts that knelt for their night rest beside the road, their drivers on the ground near them, or pacing slowly up and down.

Onto the earth Roland dropped now, and squirmed his way toward the quiet animals. In another minute he had crept alongside one of them.

There was a startled turn of the long neck, and a throaty gurgle, but, with not a second to lose, the boy climbed nimbly up on the great haunches and thrust himself in among the bales that rose on both sides of the humped back — safe!

The camel no sooner felt a strange presence than, angry and frightened, it threw itself forward and began to lurch to its feet. At that signal its companions prepared to follow, and before the cameleers were aware of it, the disturbance had run the length of the line. For a few moments a panic threatened, and if there is anything more to be dreaded than a terror-stricken caravan, neither the desert nor the camel driver knows it. At a bound the men reached their big charges, and straight at the rough flanks and swinging necks they drove with kicks and blows and curses.

"Thou child of lowest Gehennim," cried one, "may thy life be snapped off with thy next breath!"

Then, from the rear, came sounds of an argument. The hubbub of angry threats stopped as a voice shouted something up the line.

"No! No!" arose from all sides.

"What do they think," inquired one surly driver — "that caravans pick up boys by the wayside for cargo?"

At which Roland, motionless, scarcely breathing, knew they talked of him. The parley went on a moment. and now the brisk trot of horses came

nearer and nearer his hiding-place. Could they mean to search the caravan? He grew cold and sick at the thought, but the next moment his terror vanished.

"The lad never got this far," one of the riders called out, whether one of Ahmed's men, or of the opposite faction, Roland never knew.

"Back we go," the same voice continued, "till we meet the others who look for him. We shall come on him somewhere between us." And off they galloped with a flourish of flying hoofs.

Cautiously Roland lifted his head to see how matters lay. The drivers had gone forward, and presently he heard an order shouted, followed by the gurgling protest of a camel when it is made to rise. The caravan was about to go on; he would never have a better chance; and without an instant's hesitation he slid off the camel's flanks just as the long neck swept angrily around in search of its tormentor. But if there was any further trouble, Roland, flying up the dark road, never gave it thought or heed.

On now, straight west, with the bright star beginning to pale. The black of night changed to blurred gray; fields and orchards took faint outlines among the shadows. And then, out of the dim west, the breath of the sea, the taste of salt on his lips — and Roland knew that his goal was at hand. The fork in the road, as the Chevalier had said, the turn to the right, and the great camp lay before him, astir.

In the half light he could see men moving about and hear voices. All at once his knees grew weak, moisture broke out over him, and a deathly depression seized him. It seemed scarcely worth his while to go farther. How differently he had imagined his arrival: himself triumphant, exhilarated, men crowding round him, the clanking armor, the horses gorgeously arrayed! Nothing seemed worth while now, nothing except to sink down on the earth and sleep!

So it was a very subdued boy that walked unsteadily up to the first Crusader that he saw.

"Sir," he said, "will you tell me the quickest way to see your Commander?"

The man eyed him suspiciously.

"Where did you come from so early in the day," he asked, "and where did you learn Frangi, you young Syrian vagabond?"

Roland ignored the question. "I must see your Commander — at once."

Two or three bystanders heard his answer with frank amusement. He could have set matters right in a minute by mentioning his father's name and Father Gaspard's or the Chevalier's, but to be trifled with by these men for whom he had taken such chances — no, not a word of explanation!

"I have something to tell the Commandant that he must hear now."

"Your password, then," was the gruff retort.

Password! Roland wavered a little. The Cheva-

lier had not taught him one, and how was he to know terms of warfare? Then, like a Heaven-sent message, there rang through his tired senses the fine old battle-cry of the Crusaders as Father Gaspard had repeated it at Bethlehem.

"A password?" he asked. "Tell your Commander that I have come to him because," he raised his voice a little, "because '*God wills it! God wills it!*'"

That settled matters. The men sobered instantly. "That's genuine!" cried one of them. "I'll report it myself," and he ran forward.

A few minutes later Roland found himself on the outskirts of the camp, in front of a native house which, it appeared, was the Commander's quarters.

The door opened on the instant into a small room where three men sat at a table, two of them grizzled and weather-beaten, and fine enough fellows until one looked at the third, after which one had eyes for him only. Without knowing exactly why, one felt that he radiated a sort of shining authority from his ruddy hair and beard, and his eyes that danced with golden lights, to the last inch of his burnished armor.

He leaned toward Roland, smiling:

"So, 'God wills it!' Tell me who taught you that and what it is that He wills!"

At which Roland repeated what de Vaubois had said in the cave, as nearly as possible in the Crusader's words.

"Again, boy, say it again." And the three men drew a little more closely around him with their heads bent to catch every syllable.

"Now, my boy, who are you, and how is it that the Chevalier sends this message by you?"

And Roland told that, too, beginning with the words he had used so often: "I am the son of Robert Arnot."

The moment that he mentioned Father Gaspard's name, the Commander sprang up.

"Yes, yes," he cried, "I remember now when the Father inquired about this Robert Arnot; some two years ago, wasn't it?" He turned to the other two. "The boy speaks truth — there is no doubt about it. Give the order to stop all preparations for battle." As soon as they had gone: "You must forgive us," he apologized, "for making you explain yourself, lad — but you look so like a native."

"Oh," cried Roland, "that's walnut juice!" Then, unable to conceal a moment longer his impatience to get back to Khaleel, "I mustn't wait here, sir!" he stammered. "It's life and death — I mean it's a favor that I must beg of you — or rather it's —"

Before he could explain himself to the astonished Commander, the door swung open for the two aides.

"Tell us, boy," they besought him eagerly, "what sign of the Saracens did you see on your way?"

It occurred all at once to Roland that to answer

their question was the shortest road to the favor that he must ask of them, and accordingly he told the story of his capture, of the plot against the Saracen leader, and his own final dash for Kaiserieh.

From mere curiosity the three passed to delighted enthusiasm, and, in the end, to amazed silence, eyes staring and lips agape.

When Roland had come to his last word, one of the aides brought a vigorous fist down on the table. "You've done what not a soul of us has the wits for," he declared, "and some of us not the valor."

"For a knowledge of the language and the country," rejoined the other, "he's beaten us out and out, and as for sheer courage —"

"The best of it is," broke in the ruddy-haired Commandant, "the lad comes honestly by that brave name of his!"

Roland caught his breath in a tumult of memories at the dear familiarity of the words that were so like Robert Arnot's fond injunction: "See that you bear the name worthily, little Roland."

The next moment his thoughts were with Khaleel.

"The favor that I must ask, sir —" he began.

"What you will!" the Commandant interrupted. "All that we could grant would leave us still in your debt."

"A horse, then," Roland replied promptly, "to carry me as quickly as possible back to the Saracens, so that I may tell of the plot against their leader!"

If ever men were dumbfounded, it was these three who listened to the astounding proposition.

"But why risk your life to save a Saracen?" they protested.

"Because," Roland returned with spirit, "my escape is sure to bring dishonor — and perhaps worse — to him."

"Send a message by some Syrian," suggested one of the aides. "Or let some of us go with the boy," put in the other; "for he's taking his life in his hands, and that's truth!"

But none of these precautions would Roland have. He, and he alone, could prove the guilty and the innocent. "There's not a moment to lose," he ended anxiously.

At that the ruddy-haired Commander was on his feet. "If it's in your mind to go, go you shall." And, turning to his aides, "A horse," he ordered, "and food!" Then to Roland, already chafing at the delay to eat, "The time lost that way," he laughed good-humoredly, "you'll treble in speed, take the word of a soldier for it."

And once on his way, fed and satisfied, Roland found that the advice held good.

Out on the road now, and the sun not yet risen; past the halting-place of the caravan, and eastward across the purple-dun of the plain, with the sky rose-red behind the Judæan highland; then day itself, and in its full light Roland made out the ribbon of verdure that traced the course of the gorge.

Straight toward it he rode at full speed, hardly daring to think of what he should find there, or not find.

A dark line at the edge of the green told him that the Saracens were still at their post. Soon he could distinguish figures moving about, and, drawn up at one side, a large body of men and horses. And now they saw him! He knew, from the way they all at once stood still, like men turned to stone.

Without checking his speed he bore directly down on them so that they were forced to step out of his way.

"Listen to me!" he cried, and the next minute he had dismounted and stood in the midst of them all. "Listen to the riddle I propose to you!"

He paused and looked from face to face of his silence-stricken audience. There, Heaven be thanked, were Khaleel and Ahmed, untouched, unharmed. A great lump suddenly filled his throat, and he glanced away quickly from those two to make sure of a third. Yes, there! Lurking stealthily behind the others of his evil stripe, and hideously livid with fear!

"Answer my riddle!" cried Roland triumphantly. "Who is it among you that speaks in this tongue?" And in unmistakable imitation of the Arabic of Egypt he repeated the words that had burned themselves into his memory as he lay on the ground in pretended sleep.

There was a sudden confusion among the Saracens. Every eye was turned on the Egyptian.

"The child speaks truth! The word of Allah is in his mouth," cried some.

"He lies, he lies!" declared others; and, high above all, "Judgment! Judgment! I demand judgment!" screamed the foreign voice.

"You shall have judgment!" There was a moment's lull, for it was the first time that Khaleel had uttered a word. He stood now before them all, grave, unperturbed, determined.

"You shall have judgment," he repeated.

"That he shall!" cried a voice in the crowd, and, before any one realized what was happening, before even Khaleel could interfere, there was the flash of a naked blade, a horrible glimpse of two arms flung high above a face yellow with fright, of a writhing form that swayed and bent and the next moment lay on the ground limp and still.

"The same judgment on his friends!" And there was a sound of swords drawn from their scabbards.

"Back, every blade!" shouted Khaleel. He sprang into the midst of the mob. "Save your swords for the battle-field," he went on, "and have done with this child's play."

He glanced toward the terrified group that huddled around the fallen body, then he turned to the men near him and gave a quick order that no one else could hear.

"Deliver them alive and unharmed," he added as a last instruction.

Two soldiers lifted the dead Egyptian between them and disappeared down the gorge, while the others, headed by Ahmed, hustled the frightened traitors into line, tied them hand to hand, then mounted their horses and unceremoniously started their prisoners forward. For just a moment Ahmed halted by Roland.

"Child," he said, "this day has written your name in the heart of every true Saracen, Saleebi though you are!"

As he rode away, Roland found Khaleel gazing down on him with a look that made word quite empty.

"Twice, now, man-child," Khaleel spoke at last, "you've saved me from the fangs of that viper."

"How do you mean, Khaleel, twice?"

"It was the Egyptian," the man replied gravely, "who betrayed Saleem to the Saleebiyin!"

"Did you suspect him then?" Roland asked incredulously. And with a burst of recollection, "Was that what you feared when Samson asked you if you trusted your men, and you said your *own* men?"

Khaleel nodded: "That was it, man-child; ever since, I've known the viper only waited to strike. Ahmed spoke truth," he went on, "your name lives in the hearts of us all."

"Oh, but, Khaleel!" Roland burst out, miserable with all that must be concealed and unspoken

between them, "I'm a Saleebi — you must know it now — a Saleebi out and out!"

"And what else," rejoined Khaleel in the old affectionate way that Roland loved, "should you be? What I have called you once, I call you again, now and always: my second son."

"Yet always the sword is between us!" the boy said sorrowfully.

"Listen to me, son. War is a man's business, and in that business we must meet as men; but when we are together the mention of it shall not pass our lips. Between us," he ended fondly, "there is more than Saleebi and Saracen." Then, changing to playful challenge, "And where may you be bound now, man-child?"

"To the nearest village," declared Roland, falling in with Khaleel's humor, "to beg a bowl of leben, to sleep as long as I want, and then to find the nearest short cut to Samson!"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

To save time in getting back to Samson, Roland decided to return his borrowed horse to the Crusader camp by a native boy, while he himself hurried on to the hut, as he had told Khaleel, by the most direct short cuts. For Samson he must see, must tell of his errand to Kaiserieh, and of his decision to make that errand the first step in becoming a Saleebi in deed as he already was in name.

By the time he had shared the midday meal of a Syrian family who were camped in their vineyard, and had slept for a while in the shade of a friendly olive tree, there were yet some hours before sunset. Time enough to get a good start toward home and Samson, he thought happily, as he struck out across fields and orchards. There was nothing to fear now, nothing to avoid. Trusted by his own countrymen, beloved by the Saracens — ah, but it was good, this friendliness with the world. This was a day of days, and he was king of it!

Across the plain broke the low ridges of the Shephelah and already its music filled his ears; already, in imagination, he heard the coo of the wild pigeon, the drowsy hum of the bees among the thyme, the patter of little hoofs along the beaten sheep paths, and, best of all, Samson's dear

familiar call to the flock, "Come, my children, come!"

Suddenly across the peace of the boy's thoughts broke a confused murmur that grew, even as he listened, into low thunder and strident din. And then above the crest of a hill he saw something that told him what made the discordant noise. It was nothing more than a reddish cloud, but he knew instinctively that it was the dust that rose from the trampling hoofs of many horses, and that the distant uproar was the clash of sword on sword, of scimitar on shield, of Crusader courage and Saracen skill.

The next moment he was flying over the ground toward the low ridges, racing to keep abreast of the impulse which possessed him, outran him; the impulse to hold the standard of the Cross high and firm against the onslaught of the Crescent.

With every moment the noise became more distinct, and unmistakably the noise of battle, though no action was yet visible. Just as he reached the rise, a group of villagers hurried out of a vineyard, terror-stricken and breathless with running.

"If we only get out of it alive!" a woman panted, as she shifted a baby from one arm to the other. Then, as her eye lighted on Roland, "Keep away!" she warned in a frightened voice, "It's war — the Saleebiyin and the Saracens." But, without heeding her, the boy sprang forward up the slope, tak-

ing the gullies at a leap, steadying himself by a tuft of grass or a bush or whatever came to hand, until at last he was out on top.

The next minute he was looking onto the level ground below him, into the seething fury of battle itself. What he saw appeared at first to be a maze, gorgeous yet terrible, of dazzling figures that shifted and mingled, tore apart, and melted together again. Everywhere there were plunging horses and spears and lances. As his eyes grew accustomed to the sight, he began to pick out the turbans of the Saracens from the gleaming armor and the red crosses of the Franks. This, he said to himself, was one of those skirmishes by which, the Chevalier had said, the Crusaders would exhaust the enemy.

It was quite clear that each force was trying for possession of that part of the plain that lay at the foot of the ridge. Every once in a while the Saracens would scatter and appear to withdraw, then with incredible swiftness they would gather together and charge into their opponents. But each time the Crusaders met them like a wall of rock; no matter how skillful the maneuver nor from what angle it was launched, they were always magnificently ready.

The fighting redoubled its fury. Again and again the Crescent hurled its arrow-like assaults, but, as often, the Cross, unharmed and undaunted, held firm, with not an inch of ground lost, thank God!

THE FIGHTING REDOUBLED ITS FURY

All at once a disturbance became apparent in the Frankish ranks, as if the unity of purpose that held them as one man had given way. There was a moment of confusion, of wild hesitation, while they appeared to waver between rally and retreat.

"The Frangi leader has fallen!" exclaimed a voice in Arabic, and Roland started out of his absorption to find just behind him no other than his old playfellow, Rasheed.

"You, Rasheed!" Then, "How long has this been going on?" pointing to the plain below.

"Not long," replied Rasheed. "We were working in the vineyards — the rest ran away, but I came up here to watch. Look" — he broke off excitedly — "the Frangi have lost their leader. They are frightened!"

"The Frangi afraid!" But, even as Roland made the passionate denial, it died on his lips, for the Saracens, with the advantage now with them, were pressing the disordered Franks back in hopeless turmoil. The next moment the air was rent with a cry that turned him to stone, the tragic Crusader cry of acknowledged loss and defeat:

"Sauve qui peut! Sauve qui peut!"

"What is it they say?" inquired Rasheed.

"That — that — they need help," Roland stammered with difficulty.

At the sound of his own words something inside him broke loose, something that sent him plunging

down the hillside. "I'm coming!" he cried, quite unconscious that he spoke aloud. "Coming!"

"Are you mad?" shouted Rasheed's voice in his ear. "It's death down there!"

But Roland had already seen something in that tortured maze below that brought him to a standstill of his own accord. Against all the odds of panic within their own ranks and increasingly furious attacks by the enemy, the Franks were rallying; slowly, painfully, but gallantly rallying! Afraid to believe his own eyes, he watched them breathlessly. There was no mistake about it!

And once the tide had turned, they recovered themselves with a rapidity that plainly nonplused their foes. Now again they stood together as one man, the situation theirs and victory won, when, with a lightning-like maneuver, as determined as it was swift, the entire Frankish body wheeled and raced westward. Instantly the Saracens were after them in hot pursuit, and high above the din of men and horses broke the fierce battle-cry of Mohammed's followers:

"Ed-deen! Ed-deen!" [1]

Spellbound, Roland stared after the whirlwind flight until it was hidden by a wooded spur.

What did it mean? he asked himelf. Not defeat or retreat, at any rate, as any one would agree who had watched that determined movement of the Crusaders.

[1] The Faith! The Faith!

"They're gone!" Rasheed exclaimed as if he were relieved. "Come, let's take a short cut over that" — he waved a hand toward the deserted battle-field below them. "It's safe, now," he remarked significantly.

Roland turned quickly to follow the gesture. This part of battle he had never thought of, this terrible after part, when the blaze of armor and the gleam of swords had passed, and there was left only a desolation of trampled earth, a wreck of maimed bodies.

"Rasheed!" he cried, "we must go to them — help them!"

"They won't need help long," protested Rasheed; but he nevertheless followed Roland who had started ahead down the hillside.

The fighting had been so furious that its victims who still lived were mercifully few in number, and those, as Rasheed had observed, wouldn't long need help. For the first moment that Roland looked down on the ghastly faces and bodies, he wanted to run away, to shut out forever from his eyes and ears this welter of horror. And then, as he saw one poor creature fling up a maimed arm in mortal anguish, an agony of pity surged over him and he sprang to answer the dumb appeal.

"Water!" he cried to Rasheed. "That's the first thing! Haven't you a water skin in the vineyard?"

"Two!" said Rasheed, responding to his mood, "and the spring is near."

But it was quite clear that he shrank from the sight of pain, so, while he fetched and carried water, Roland held the skin bottle for those who could drink, or bathed the lips and faces of those who lay unconscious and moaning.

Once, as he was trying to ease a Crusader whom he found face down, the man smiled in a puzzled way.

"Is it my little Jean," he whispered, "or do I dream — or have I —" His voice trailed off into an indistinct babble.

"Ah, he thinks he is at home," Roland said to himself; "perhaps in a garden like ours and playing with his little Jean. See," he said, aloud, "I'll move you like this, very gently," lifting the head and propping it on his knee, "so you'll be easier."

The soldier lay still, looking off with unseeing eyes.

"Ah, it is a beautiful dream," he sighed contentedly; and in a few moments, "Good-night, little one."

And when Roland laid the quiet body down, the man's face was peaceful and smiling, as if, indeed, he played with his little Jean in some far-away beautiful garden.

"If they all could die as happily," the boy thought to himself, "or if only Samson were here to help and we could get as much water as they wanted." Then, as a shriek of pain rang out near him, "Quick, Rasheed, over here!" he called.

The next moment he bent over a young Saracen who had been struck down where the battle had been hottest. All around him were bodies of men and of horses, just as they had fallen, and directly across him lay a rigid figure clad from head to foot in the armor of France. The lad was calling wildly on Allah to end his suffering.

"Wait a little," Roland said, as if he were humoring a sick child, "drink some water first. Now — where is the pain?"

"My leg — something is pressing into it. O Allah," he groaned, "spare me a little of this!"

"We can lift that, can't we?" Roland signed to Rasheed, and together they moved the armored figure that lay across the Saracen.

All at once Rasheed caught Roland by the sleeve.

"He isn't dead," he whispered, "that Saleebi — look!"

As Rasheed spoke, Roland saw a slight movement of the helmet-covered head. In a minute he had raised the visor, but at the first sight of the face beneath it he started back with a cry of amazement. The shock of thick gray hair, the level black brows — he knew them the moment they were uncovered. The man was no other than the General from whom he had taken Saleem! He turned quickly to Rasheed, "Go on to the others with one bottle, and leave me one." Then, as the lad eyed him curiously, "I know the Saleebi — I must stay with him," he said.

He dropped on his knees beside the motionless body and laid his girdle, soaked with water, on the bloodless face. Again and again he did this, and at last the eyelids fluttered faintly and opened. At first the eyes stared at him, blank and dull; then a bewildered expression came into them, and, as the boy watched breathlessly, they suddenly flashed into recognition, amused recognition.

"So!" — with a quizzical little smile, "you still have your notions about helping people in trouble!"

"Oh, sir, I wish with my whole heart it might have been in a happier way!" and Roland held the skin to the man's lips. "Now, if I could find your wound, perhaps I could ease you."

The General touched his left side: "Here — but best leave it alone," with a smothered cry. He lay for a while with closed eyes, and when he opened them he looked at Roland as if he were trying to remember something.

"There is something I must tell you" — a long pause — "something you want to know very much — but I can't remember — I can't —" a spasm of pain seized him, and he lay in its grip, half conscious.

What did he mean, Roland asked himself over and again: "Something you want to know." Could it be the thing he wanted most of all to know — he hardly dared to put the thought into words — that his father —

"Look at the sun," Rasheed broke in on him

impatiently; "it's almost set. We can't stay here any longer if I'm to get home to-night — and they're expecting me."

"Some one is sure to pass by here," Roland reminded him, "who will take word back that you're safe."

Rasheed shook his head. "Didn't you see the people running away? No, no one will come near *this* place, even if the vineyards are never picked!"

"Oh, Rasheed, don't go!" he exclaimed; "he can't live long — you see that for yourself — we must do what we can for him."

So at last the Syrian boy yielded, wrapped himself in his abba and sat down with Roland to wait for whatever was to come.

Presently the General stirred. "Did you see the skirmish? Were we defeated or did my ruse go through?"

"The Crusaders fought gallantly," Roland assured him, "but the ruse, you say, sir — ?"

"When I could keep up no longer, I told young Rohan to make one more stand and then instantly to turn and flee."

"Yes!" cried Roland, "I saw that, and I saw the Saracens follow, and I wondered —"

There was a triumphant laugh. "It was a trap, boy, to lure the Saracens on to where another band of us waited! I doubt," with grim significance, "if many of the infidels return from that pursuit!"

What if, the boy thought with a sudden pang,

Khaleel or Ahmed were among those who would not return! It was a heartrending business, this having friends on both sides.

"How did you happen along here?" the Crusader inquired presently. "Was the Jewish shepherd with you?"

Whereupon Roland explained his presence and the errand on which he had been.

"*You* took the word? You?" The General reached up and drew the boy down to him. "There!" he said, "and there, and there!" And he kissed him on the forehead and on each cheek, at which Roland knew that the old score between them was forever wiped out. With sudden resolution he bent close to the wounded man.

"Sir," he said gently, "you spoke of something you wished to say to me, something you said I ought to know —"

"To be sure!" the General broke in. "It all comes to me again. I remember, then directly I forget; but now, while my head is clear" — his voice took on its accustomed authority — "listen to what I tell you."

Between pauses for breath, he said that some months ago he had gone into northern Syria, and there had run across a terribly crippled Crusader who was, in fact, dying.

"I asked him how he had been so severely hurt," the General continued. "In a battle near Acre, he told me. Then he went on to say that he and his

comrade were among the few Franks to escape alive; at least, he added, '*I didn't see him die!*' His peculiar emphasis on the last words made me ask him what he meant. As nearly as I can remember this is what he said:

"'After the battle some of the Franks tried to rescue their wounded. They were just about to lift me up when I heard one of them exclaim, "Look at this poor fellow! We can never carry him away in such shape — he's cut to pieces and soaked with blood!" "Well," another one answered, "here's a Saracen who has gone to Paradise. He'll be none the worse if we take his clothes for a soldier of France!"'

"Although he was in terrible pain, the crippled soldier said that the men's talk aroused his curiosity and he turned enough to see what they were doing:

"'They had wrapped the wounded man in the Saracen's clothes and were binding up his head in the turban, when they happened to move aside so that I looked full into his face. I remember I was so startled that I cried out — for it was no other than my comrade! Then before any one had a chance to say another word, we heard the Saracen cry, "Ed-deen! Ed-deen!" and those demons of infidels were upon us with fresh forces. Our men barely succeeded in escaping with a few of us wounded ones, and in the panic and the rush,' the cripple concluded, 'my dear comrade was left behind!'

"The poor fellow's grief was so evident," the General said, "that I asked him his friend's name."

Roland leaned down, scarcely breathing, to hear what something told him was coming.

"He replied," the General continued, "that it was Robert Arnot!"

Roland bent his head, unable at first to speak. Then, "Robert Arnot," he whispered, "my father!"

"I'm sure of it, though at first I couldn't place the name. I kept repeating it to myself, 'Robert Arnot, Robert Arnot' — where had I heard it? And then it came to me all at once, how you told me you had come to Palestine to find your father, Robert Arnot."

The General was plainly exhausted and lay silent for some time. Roland's thoughts raced wildly through his head. His strong, laughing young father wounded to the death, left either to a lingering agony or to the mercy of the enemy! At best, what could one hope? He clutched his throat to keep down the convulsive choking that would come.

As if the General read his thoughts, he said, after a while:

"Pin your hope to this, lad: no one has seen him die!" He turned his gaze full on the boy. "You've more than made good your promise to me, and you've proved yourself, body and soul, a Crusader. I — salute — you — Comrade!"

Presently his lips moved, and Roland, bending

over him, heard him whisper faintly, "*No one has seen him die.*" Almost instantly the body relaxed like a tired child's; there was a long sigh, then unbroken quiet, and the General, like the father of little Jean, slept at last.

What should be done now? the boy wondered. There was a bare chance that the Crusaders might return to bury their leader. Should he wait for them? No! he suddenly decided. He himself would serve his friend to the end. The General should take his last rest in a cave of the Shephelah as many another had done before him; not, indeed, men of the same blood, Roland reflected, but comrades, nevertheless, in the great brotherhood of stout hearts and noble deeds.

So, in the first gray light of dawn, he told Rasheed his plan: "While I look for a place near by," he concluded, "you stay here and watch."

Together they laid the General in the cave that Roland chose, and then they closed it with rocks. Finally, above the low entrance, Roland cut the Crusader Cross, and into its four deep gashes he wedged small stones that were sure to set, and so preserve the sign.

It came to him that perhaps there should be some word to show the soldier's rank; and then, as he stepped back to survey the work, what more could there be? he asked himself. It was the emblem of the Cause to which the Crusader had given his life. The Cross, known alike to Saracen and Frank!

Just then, over the Judæan hills flamed the crimson and gold of sunrise. With a start, Roland remembered that it was two days past the time that he had told Samson to watch for him.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

ONCE started for the hut, nothing should delay him, Roland told himself, except a moment's stop at the rose-hedge that by now was so familiar to him. For nothing and no one would he pass that by. It seemed to him, as he laid hands to the satin petals, that he heard his father's voice, felt his mother's breath on his cheek. Then, one of the half-blown buds in his girdle, and he was off again, over the hills, to Samson and the sheep.

It was an affectionate dispute afterward, as to which saw the other first.

"As if," Roland contended, "I didn't see you the minute I came out of the olive grove!"

"As if," retorted Samson, "I hadn't watched for you from the hour you went away, and didn't see you while you were yet among the trees!" All at once he held Roland off at arm's length. "Something has happened to change the boy to a man," he said finally.

"Something *has* happened, Samson — everything in the world, almost!'

And, beginning with the secret meeting in the cave, Roland gave Samson the history of his adventures. It was the General's story, of course, that stirred them most, the boy in the telling and the man in the hearing of it.

"Do you think, Samson, that there is any hope that my father lived?"

"The message was of him *living*, not dead," Samson declared, "and this" — he touched the rose in Roland's girdle — "what is it if not an omen of life?"

"That's what the General said," Roland reflected aloud — "'No one has seen him die.' Yet, if he lives, Samson, how is it that none of us can find him?"

"Wherever he is, little brother, be sure that only by *word of mouth* shall we hear of him or he of us," Samson said decisively. "We must keep on telling of him, asking for him — and never a breath of giving up hope!"

"But whatever comes," Roland said finally, "I must be what my father would have me!"

Samson glanced at him as if he knew what was coming and dreaded to hear it, but Roland went on quickly:

"I can't help but love this — the Shephelah, and the sheep! Sometimes it seems as if there couldn't be a happier life than tending them. But I mustn't stay, Samson! No," he said slowly, "I *must* go, and I *want* to go, to the service of the Saleebi wars."

"I have always known that this would come — but not so soon!" Samson said with a look of desolation that made Roland turn away.

"But you're right, little brother," he went on

steadily; "we can't help but heed this call from our own blood. You see how it is — you follow the sword, I my sheep."

"It will be hard to be on the other side from Khaleel, and hardest of all to leave the Shephelah — and — you."

The last words were hardly audible, but Samson knew all that was in the boy's heart. Ah, blessedly understanding Samson, who spared one the need of speech!

"When will you go, little brother?" he asked at last, very gently.

"Soon, Samson. Only I *should* like a few more days to look at everything all over again — and to play sheep with Abou!"

"There is another besides Abou Kbeer who is anxious to see you — Khaleel! Yes," in answer to Roland's cry of delight, "he was here last night, and he told me he should come every day until you were back here safely. If I'm not mistaken, you'll see him before morning!"

True to the prediction, Khaleel appeared that very evening just as the sheep were driven into the fold.

"Allah be praised!" he called out in a tone of relief as the boy ran to him.

"I thought I should find you here before this" — his only reference to their last meeting. "Have you been safe and well, man-child?" he inquired anxiously.

"Safe and well," Roland assured him. "As if you hadn't enough to look after, without adding me!" he protested affectionately.

"If a hair of Saleem's head were in danger would there be peace or rest for me?" Khaleel asked him. "And what is in my heart for him is there for you."

He threw the reins over Il Howa's neck and sat down by Samson, while Roland stretched himself on the ground near them. It was on the tip of his tongue to ask Khaleel what was happening down on the plain, but he caught himself up with their pact still in his ears: "When we are together, the mention of war shall not pass our lips." He would know for himself soon now, he reflected, how matters stood, and for this little while it was good to be here with these two best beloved, good to forget, for a few hours, that the whole countryside smouldered with war and waited only for a signal to burst into flame.

Half absently he felt in his girdle for the rose, faded now, but still sweet, and began to unfold the petals as if he searched tenderly for its heart. Samson recognized his enjoyment of the flower as a sign of his fullness of content, and watched him with smiling, affectionate eyes, when a startled movement from Khaleel arrested his attention.

Oblivious of everything but Roland, the Saracen was leaning forward in an attitude of suppressed excitement, his lips parted, his eyes devouring the boy. After some moments he asked breathlessly:

"What do you search for?"

Roland made no answer at first. "It's just a habit, Khaleel," he said at last, laughing a little. "I used to see my father turn back the petals so."

Khaleel smothered a low cry, but Roland, gazing into the rose, paid no heed.

"And now," he went on, "I do it when I think of our garden at home — of my mother — and my father."

The next moment he was questioning Samson with his eyes. "I'm going to tell Khaleel what the General said!" he declared finally.

All through the story Khaleel listened with the rapt concentration on Roland that had arrested Samson's notice.

"We must spread this far and wide and up and down," observed Samson at the end.

Khaleel assented absently, as if he were turning something over in his mind. At last he stood up, as if he had made a decision.

"Man-child," he said abruptly, "you asked me once about the great castle of Kaukab-il-howa; what do you say to making an excursion to it, you and Samson, and seeing it for yourself? — And if I should be there to show it to you!"

Roland had sprung up at the name of the Crusader fortress, his imagination on fire in a moment. Kaukab-il-howa! Romantic proof of Crusader courage and skill, that held its head so high and

brave among the clouds and winds that far and wide men called it Star-of-the-Wind.

"Shall we, Samson?" he cried.

But Samson was already at the heart of the matter: "Just what I've always wanted, little brother! And I can show you my country on the way up there — and my city, Jerusalem! We'll make a holiday of it!"

"A holiday!" The word struck accusingly across Roland's high spirits. What had he to do with holidays, and the Crusader banners already beckoning him? The next moment Samson's keen eyes had fathomed his distress and were signaling, "Just these few days together, little brother!"

And so the matter was settled.

"But the sheep, Samson?" Roland asked anxiously. "Who will take care of them?"

"Any one of three shepherds that I know," Samson replied promptly. "We'll be off day after to-morrow!"

Khaleel caught him up on the instant. "And you will take perhaps eight days to it? Good! Ten days from now, at Kaukab-il-howa — the three of us." He spoke to Samson, but it was Roland's face that he studied with eyes that had never before been so blackly luminous, so bafflingly inscrutable.

Samson nodded: "Ten days, Khaleel, yes; at Kaukab-il-howa."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

"Now!" Samson halted, a hand on Roland's shoulder. "Look your first on Jerusalem!"

They had chosen their own paths from the Shephelah to Judæa, and now, in the early forenoon, they struck into the highway alive, its dusty length, with the traffic of a Syrian road; peddlers afoot, richly dressed men on horseback, fellaheen[1] with jars of water or baskets of fruit; camels, mules, a flock of sheep, and now and then a donkey whipped up to a quicker pace by the boy that ran at its side.

Jerusalem!

Roland thrilled to the word: the dream of the Children Crusaders, the goal of every soldier of the Cross, and the throbbing heart of the Crusades themselves! Then, as he followed Samson's pointing finger, he saw, at the top of a rugged slope that rose from deep surrounding valleys, a length of gray wall, with a glimpse of roofs beyond to tell of the city it circled. He looked at Samson to be sure that he had understood him: could this somber fortress be Jerusalem, that in his thoughts had towered joyous and golden to the very skies?

"But the walls, Samson" — he ventured at last

[1] Peasants.

— "they look like a prison! I should feel shut in by them."

"Not when you're used to them," Samson rejoined, "nor when you know how they've stood between Jerusalem and her enemies always, from her first days; razed to the ground, to be sure, more than once by destroying armies, but just as surely built again, and, in the long run, of course, a protection."

Moreover, he assured Roland, the gateways in them, half a dozen or so, made it an easy matter to enter or leave the city at will, north, south, east, or west.

It was from the western entrance, the Bab-il-Khaleel, that the stream of people on the road had come, and through which, in fact, they themselves would pass. Presently they were in the shadow of the gray walls, past the great gate, then in the square beyond, and engulfed at once in the most amazing medley of people, of animals, of colors.

"Wait a moment," Roland urged breathlessly, "Let's look at them — where do they all come from, Samson?"

"See," laughed Samson, "there are Saracens — they're no strangers to you! And that tall fellow is a Bedouin, from the desert. He's a Circassian, that fair-faced youth, from the north; but as for that one" — he hesitated, his eyes on a man in a flowing white robe — "what do you call him?" he inquired of a bystander.

"A Greek," was the reply with a gesture to the west; "from across the Great Sea."

"The north, the desert, the sea!" Roland repeated wonderingly. And, as he gazed at the bewildering variety of nationalities and of types, of costumes and of colors, "The whole world comes here," he cried, "every one, Samson!"

"Almost — yes."

There was a reluctance in the grave assent that turned Roland suddenly thoughtful: this Jerusalem was the city of Samson's nation, he reflected, with a sudden pang. Yet here, where Greek and Bedouin and Saracen and many others met and mingled, there was no room for the ancient owners and rulers of the land. At that Roland's heart leaped to his own countrymen, who, not so long ago, had held Jerusalem. For them, as for Samson's people, there was no place here. Unconsciously he made a restless movement that caught Samson's eye.

"Come, little brother, let's be off! Don't let them disturb you," he smiled over his shoulder, as he pushed his way through the crowded square, "and don't let them separate us."

But, in spite of the warning, the boy, fresh from the quiet of the pastures, gave way instinctively every time he was jostled. It was not only people for whom he must step aside, but quite as often for a flock of shiny black goats, or a long string of camels which mingled with the throngs in the most

matter-of-fact way and always managed to occupy the middle of the thoroughfare.

Buying and selling! Selling and buying! That seemed to be the main business of every one, from the vendor of sweetmeats who thrust his wares in the faces of the passers-by, to the peasant driving his sheep to the slaughter-house. A sudden revolt for the elbowing, pushing crowds and their barter swept over Roland. It was all so noisy, so cramped, and *so old!* Somehow one felt that those narrow, gloomy streets had always been there, and the people, and the animals, and the bargaining, and the jingling of coin.

"Let's get away, Samson," he urged, "where there's real air to breathe!"

"So we will, little brother, but, first, this way: there's something I want to show you."

More dingy streets that sometimes dipped down slippery steps; and squalid alleys and low, vaulted passages, but, at last, the great pillared gateway of the northern wall, the beautiful Bab-il-Amood.[1]

Samson cast a quick glance about, and, having found what he wanted, beckoned Roland over to an outside stairway that led them to a flat roof. Jerusalem lay beneath them, a medley of crowded houses, of adjoining walls, of domes, large and small.

Presently Roland's eyes were caught by a glint of color on the edge of the somber town, a dome quite different from any other, that rose from the

[1] The Damascus Gate; literally, Gate of the Columns.

space around it, an exquisite bubble of magically blended grace and strength. It was as if the stern old city had smiled at him through her gloom and offered, as recompense, this bit of loveliness.

"What is it, Samson?" he cried out delightedly.

Samson smiled, pleased with the boy's pleasure.

"The Dome of the Rock, the Saracens' place of worship," he replied thoughtfully, "and beautiful as one could wish if — if one could forget what was there before it, lifetime upon lifetime before!"

Roland recognized the look that came into Samson's eyes when he spoke of his people.

"In place of that" — there was a sweeping gesture to include the Dome and the space around it — "the Temple! Our Temple of Jehovah!"

It was the solemn voice, as much as the words, that gave Roland the feeling that Samson was looking far back into the dim ages, and out of them was calling to life a long-dead past.

"There were wide courts where the people might worship," he went on, "and altars for their sacrifices, and columns of marble and of brass. There was gold and silver everywhere, curtains of scarlet and purple, and precious woods and metals of the most perfect workmanship. And in the midst of all this splendor, the priests in their rich robes, the music of many instruments, the people awed and reverent in the great courts; and at last, a fragrant cloud of incense rising heavenward in token of the prayers they sent up to Jehovah."

As Samson spoke, he seemed to Roland to be lifted away from the present to that far-away time of which he spoke, to take on, unconsciously, the lofty spirit and the noble dignity of a great race singled out and set apart from all others.

Presently he said, "I brought you here, little brother, as my father brought me, to tell you what he told me when I was half as high as you!"

"But Samson, the Temple — ?" Roland's eyes scanned the distant Dome and then sought Samson's for the answer to his unfinished question.

Samson nodded understandingly, and almost wearily, the boy thought.

"Laid waste to the very ground," he answered slowly, as if the words came hard, "torn stone from stone by a foreign enemy, lost to us — forever lost. Afterward, long afterward, the Saracens built their Dome over the ruins."

A hundred other questions sprang to Roland's mind, but he only drew close to the silent figure and laid hold of the rough abba sleeve.

"Let's go, Samson — out to the good bare earth and the clean smell of the air!"

Samson turned instantly with his old smile: "Streets and people are a poor exchange for our hills and the sheep!"

"No exchange at all, Samson. Why, there isn't a single person in all these crowds that compares with Abou Kbeer!"

As they made their way through the Bab-il-

Amood and struck out to the north of the city, Roland noticed that a sultry mist had clouded the sun, and cast a gloom over everything. Even Samson seemed possessed by the general dejection, and strode along wrapped in an abstraction that was as gray as the day.

"It's always so when I come to Jerusalem," he brought out at last; "it's so sad, so weary —"

"Did you feel that, too?" Roland broke in sympathetically.

"Who could help it?" with a tragic gesture. "Yes, she *is* old and weary — why not? So many times her enemies have swept upon her, from north and south and east and west, fallen on her, torn at her like wild beasts! Ah," he went on, in an anguished voice that made Roland long to cry out some word of comfort, "how can she be anything but old and sad? Starved by famine over and again, bleeding of her wounds, all but dying, not once, but many times! Perhaps," more calmly, "it was to prove that only Jehovah's city could bear such blows and still live. I think that was what my mother had in mind when she said, one day after she had told me one of our stories, 'Some day Jerusalem will be what its name means, the City of Peace.'" After a while he added quietly, "I should like you to know that story, little brother." To which Roland, who knew Samson's mood of wanting to talk, uninterrupted, about his his people, replied only by moving nearer to him.

"Down there," Samson began at once, pointing to the east, "on the shores of the Bahr Lût,[1] is where it happened."

"A foreign army had attacked Jerusalem, and, after they had starved it out, they ended by destroying it. Somehow or other a band of our people, men, women, and children, escaped, made their way over a savage wilderness and took refuge on a great rock, the Rock of Masada, that juts into the Bahr Lût.

"If you could see that wilderness of death through which they had to pass," Samson interrupted himself, "and Masada itself, so steep and pitiless that from just one side can it be climbed, and then only by a goat path!

"Well, they held out for some time in spite of the enemy who followed and laid siege to them even there. They must have known what the end would be, and when it came, at last, they never quailed.

"There was only one way by which they could escape surrender and keep their liberty, and that way they took."

Samson paused to gaze somberly off to the east.

"Without fear or hesitation they chose that way," he repeated. "Each man agreed first to kill his own wife and children."

"Samson!" Roland cried out in incredulous horror; "not *that!*"

"Would the enemy have done it more kindly?"

[1] The Dead Sea.

Samson asked grimly. "When that was accomplished," he continued, "they chose ten others to make way with the rest, and then one of the ten, by agreement, put his nine companions to the sword, and after that, himself. And that," he ended, "is my people's Last Story."

"A glorious one, Samson!" Roland managed to get out as he fought down a choking impulse to cry out in wild protest.

Samson assented silently and they walked on, each with his thoughts on the intrepid little band and its ageless victory.

"See," said Samson, all at once coming out of his reverie, "the sun!" The fog had lightened to thin floating haze, and through it Roland made out patches of blue sky. Involuntarily they turned to look behind them, and the next moment they had forgotten everything but the glory that filled their eyes.

The clouds had parted about Jerusalem, and, full in the sunlight, it hung like a jewel between seas of amethyst and pearl. Jerusalem, old and gray and weary, had passed away, and in its stead was a city, young and beautiful, her wounds healed, her troubles soothed, the City of Peace.

"Jerusalem as she will be!" Roland heard Samson whisper to himself, and then, without knowing why, he found himself thinking of a day when he was a little fellow and had somehow hurt himself. His mother had knelt beside him and comforted

him; and after a while she had dried his eyes and said, "Now, we'll wipe the tears away!" Ah, he knew now why he had remembered this. Because it was as if a great and loving Someone had wiped away the tears of Jerusalem, and gently calmed her grief.

After a while, as they were walking on, Roland asked Samson what he wanted most for Jerusalem.

"Best of all," he replied, "I'd like her to be just what she is named, the *City of Peace*, where every one might worship and meditate freely; where differences should be laid aside; where scholars and sages would come, and pilgrims and peasants!"

A city of scholars and worshipers! That seemed a splendid thought to Roland, and it deepened into another: peace must come at last to all of Syria; and her real life, the life of the vineyards and pastures and harvest fields that flowed on strong and sweet under the surface-turmoil, would in the end triumph over war and famine.

And if for a while his part must be war, it was a war to bring Syria a truer peace, to make her the crown of all Christendom, a *Holy* Land, indeed.

At that his thoughts went to the Crusader armies. These few days with Samson over, and not an hour should pass before he was on his way to them. If they still waited their chance to surprise the enemy, well and good; if he should find the plains ablaze with battle, well and good, too. There would be something for him to do, though it was only to ease

wounded men, and he liked to think of such service as the payment of his debt to the dying General for that last word of comfort and assurance.

Was there more than a breath of hope in it? Much more, Samson stoutly maintained, and never failed to remind the boy that it was a message of his father living and not dead.

"If I should find him," Roland said one day, "his first word will be of my mother — and how can I tell him?"

Samson was instantly all sympathy: "What you tell him is that which you share with him and bear with him, little brother."

Meanwhile the country unrolled before them like a vivid scroll painted with the sunshine of late Syrian summer. The purple hilltops of Judæa gave way to Samaria stretched at ease in her golden plenty and her loaded vineyards; and Samaria, to the hills and oaks of Galilee, with great Hermon white and mystical in the north.

At last, one day, as Samson, just ahead of Roland, clambered up the bank of a stony brook-bed, he gave a little cry of satisfaction. The next minute he had reached down and swung the boy up abreast of him.

"See," he said, "up yonder — Kaukab-il-howa!"

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

A BOLD headland that thrust away from the rest of the land, and on its crest a rugged crown of wall and turret and tower!

Belvoir, of the Crusaders! The Saracens' Star-of-the-Wind! And rightly named, if ever words spoke truth; for, with its Frankish masters, one must own its claim to widespread beauty from Hermon's snow to Jordan's sunken green; and, with its Saracen conquerors, sing its fellowship with the winds of heaven! Other castles might cling along mountain-sides or find foothold on their summits, but this gray defense, whose walls seemed only the bold slopes risen higher, looked a part of the headland itself.

Roland surveyed it, torn between pride and regret. The patience and courage of these Frangi who had planted their great brave strongholds all up and down this land that was half a world away from their mother country! If the same persistence that built them had kept them!

"How long will it take to climb up there?" he inquired presently.

"Let's find out!" Samson challenged, starting ahead. "I look for Khaleel anywhere along the way now," he observed presently, and as he spoke there flitted before him an image of the Saracen

as he devoured Roland with amazed, incredulous gaze.

There was hardly chance for reflection or talk while they made the steep ascent, but at last they stood, breathless, under the castle walls, speechless with wonder at the heights and depths about them.

"Which is the greater marvel," Samson asked, "so much of the earth spread out for us to look at, or so much of the sky?"

"Do you know," Roland answered thoughtfully, his eyes on the solid masonry laid with such pains of detail, "the greatest wonder to me is that men should climb up here and build — that! I'm glad it was my people who did it!"

"Courage and patience," Samson agreed generously, "plenty of them, was what they had, little brother. I should think," he went on, looking about, "that we would see some one."

"Let's go in," suggested Roland.

"If we can find an opening large enough," laughed Samson, eyeing the slit-like windows.

They found an entrance presently, that was plainly the main one of the castle. The heavy door stood wide open and unguarded, and still there was no one to be seen on the walls or at the towers.

"It was left open for us, don't you think?"

"Perhaps," Samson said uncertainly; "though it seems almost as if something had happened, as if the place were deserted or as if we were in a dream."

"A dream," Roland bantered, "that Khaleel will wake us out of! I'm going in to find him — come!" And with that he stepped through the gateway, laughing, and a little excited.

They found themselves in a paved courtyard open to the sky and enclosed by the inner walls of the castle. At one side was a colonnade into which opened several narrow passageways.

"Now, we'll be sure to see some one," Roland said confidently.

Before Samson could reply, a sound of footsteps, slow, regular footsteps, broke the silence, and from one of the passages appeared a man in the dress of a Saracen soldier, except that his great shock of white hair was bare of turban. The next moment, he faced about and, with head bent, paced deliberately to the farther end of the colonnade, as if he were on an accustomed duty.

"Ah!" Roland leaned forward, his hands clutching his throat, his eyes riveted on the retreating figure.

"What is it, little brother?" Samson cried out in alarm; then, as he followed the boy's gaze, a great light broke over his anxious face. But Roland neither heard nor saw him. He knew only that something in that soldierly bearing, something about those broad shoulders, knocked at the door of memory and was answered by pulses that hammered his veins and roared in his ears. Nothing in the world mattered to him but this solitary

soldier who now turned again and marched slowly forward, his eyes fixed on the rose that he held in his hand!

The next thing that Roland knew was that he had flung himself in the man's path and that a strange, shaking voice was saying, "Father! Father — why, father!"

Samson, in an ecstasy of hope and suspense, saw the soldier step back as if he had been struck, saw the muscles of his face working convulsively, and heard him make strange, inarticulate sounds that formed themselves at last into "Roland — Roland —"

Ah, there was no doubt now who this white-haired stranger was! And Samson, alone in the shadow of the walls, repeated softly, "Jehovah be praised! Jehovah be praised!" While, behind a pillar at the farthest end of the court, some one who had watched everything from his hiding-place, some one with a lean, dark face and eyes of black light, whispered, "Allah is great! Allah is good!"

"Roland, little son — mine!" Over and over Robert Arnot held the boy off to devour him with his eyes, only to draw him hungrily into his arms and to lay his cheek on the bright hair in a passion of tenderness. And Roland — struggling between tears and laughter, and fond little incoherencies that had neither beginning nor end, and wonder at this unbelievable thing that in one breath had

transformed his world — knew only that here in these strong arms was home at last!

Yet, in this tumult of emotions he was half aware of a change in his father, not the outward one of the whitened hair, but something far more subtle and impossible to put into words.

Hardly had the thought formed itself in the boy's mind than the dear voice, so familiar, yet so strangely unfamiliar, began to speak.

"She always used to be with you," it said in a slow, thick way, as if the tongue were unused to its work — "Where is she?"

Instantly Roland sensed the truth of what he had half feared: the thing that had whitened his father's hair and weighted his speech had tampered with his mind! What should he do, how answer?

In his extremity he looked around instinctively for Samson — though for these moments he had forgotten him — and Samson, who always knew one's need without being told, came at once out of the shadow of the walls to answer the unspoken appeal.

"Something has happened to him, Samson — what?"

Samson surveyed Robert Arnot with the same solicitude he would have shown one of the sheep in trouble.

"Nothing the matter with the body," he decided finally. "That is as beautiful as one could wish," with a look of frank admiration.

At that moment the silent watcher at the end of the court emerged from his hiding-place, and just as Samson finished speaking Khaleel appeared at his side. There was a minute of blank surprise, and then a light broke over Samson's face.

"You brought us to Kaukab-il-howa for — this!"

"Did you, Khaleel?" Roland seized the man's hands. "Did you know my father was here? How did you find out?"

"Partly from you, man-child, when you told me the story of the Frangi soldier who was left on the battle-field in the clothes of a Saracen," Khaleel replied, smiling, "and partly" — he leaned over and touched the rose in Robert Arnot's hand — "partly from this! Do you remember that I asked you that night at the hut why you searched the heart of the rose?"

Robert Arnot, meanwhile, seemed to have forgotten his question to Roland, and looked from one face to another with bewildered eyes, but, when Khaleel touched the rose that he held, he drew away sharply.

"That is some one I love!" and he laid the flower jealously to his cheek. "Some one," he went on uncertainly, "whose name is —" He stopped helplessly, his perplexed gaze on Roland.

In a flash it came to the boy what to do: his father must be made to roll back the cloud that dimmed the past, now, without a moment's delay.

He looked up into the troubled face and smiled confidently. "Whose name is —" he prompted slowly.

Robert Arnot caught at the words: "Whose name is —" he began, hesitated, then stopped, his eyes wandering.

The next moment he brought them back to Roland, and, with an evident effort, held them there. The muscles of his throat contracted, his lips parted, formed broken sounds. All at once Roland knew what was happening; and Samson and Khaleel, pressing so close to him in their excitement that he could feel their breath on his neck, knew, too: Robert Arnot was trying to remember — how desperately, only the three could tell who watched his struggle, and saw his face beaded with moisture, the veins like cords on forehead and neck.

"Whose name —" he began again; then, with a sudden joyous movement, he flung up his head and his voice rang through the court — "is *Rose!*" And in the next breath, "Where is she?" he demanded jealously.

A pitying murmur broke from Samson and Khaleel, for, without understanding the man's language, they knew what he meant.

"She sent me to find you, father," came instinctively to Roland's lips, and, before he had time to remember that this was the question he had dreaded, he was answering it: answering it with the

dear intimacy that his father had taught him, arm in arm and cheek to cheek. Indeed, it was only the sense of that comradeship that gave Roland heart to go through with the story, from the first of it, when he had waked to find Rose dressed as Uncle Jacques, even to the black night when she gave him her last brave charge: "Bear your name worthily. Never stop looking for father!"

Long before the end, Robert Arnot guessed what it would be, and, knowing, was able to bear it with fortitude because, as Samson had foretold, it was Roland who told him and Roland who shared it with him.

"She has brought us together, little son," he said at last, "and so, please Heaven, shall we remain for the rest of our days." He was silent for a long time, his eyes on the rose that he kept by him, his thoughts, as Roland knew well, in the flowery little garden at home and all that it had held of life and joy.

By and by he drew Roland to him and tilted his face up, hand under chin, in the old, familiar way.

"How long have you been looking for me?" he asked.

"Two years and a little more."

Robert Arnot appeared to consider. Again his face contracted and the veins swelled. It was plain to the three who watched him that he was trying to recall something, that past and present were groping toward each other.

"Talk to him," Khaleel whispered in Roland's ear; "tell him what the Frangi General told you."

"Father," Roland said promptly, "when did you come here — to this castle?"

Robert Arnot looked at the boy blankly, and shook his head: "I don't know."

"Was it after a battle, a battle near Acre?"

"I was *in* a battle near Acre!" his father declared triumphantly.

"And afterward?"

"I can't remember," with the old puzzled look. "Something happened in the very midst of it — and then nothing more, only that I found myself here."

With that, Roland repeated word for word the story that the dying General had told him, and when at last he ended by saying, "That Frangi soldier whom his comrades dressed in the clothes of the dead Saracen was *you*, father," Robert Arnot sprang up in his excitement.

"I could take my oath on it," he declared; "and yet all I can vouch for is that I was in the thick of battle, when all at once a black pit swallowed me up. And that is what it has been ever since — blackness."

Roland turned to Samson and Khaleel. "He remembers the battle, but nothing afterward."

"Do you know why?" Khaleel said at once. "See! Feel!" and he took the boy's hand and guided it over the snow-white head. Under his

fingers Roland felt a thick, welt-like ridge that ran from the crown into the nape of the neck, the scar of what must have been a ferocious gash from a Saracen sword.

"Hardly a fortnight ago," Khaleel continued, while Roland translated the Arabic for Robert Arnot, "I stopped at Kaukab-il-howa and, while I waited here in the court, a soldier passed me several times. I noticed at once that though his clothes were like ours his features were Frangi; but what attracted my attention most was that he always held a rose whose petals he never ceased to caress."

"Didn't I tell you," Samson put in softly, "that the rose was an omen of life?"

And Robert Arnot observed quietly: "It was my only light in all that time of darkness. Though I couldn't tell why, I knew that I must never be without one."

"I asked my friend the Ameer here," Khaleel went on, "who the man was, and he was astonished that I didn't know, since the Frangi, for Frangi he was, had been at Kaukab-il-howa for a year. He told me, then, that after a battle outside Acre, two years ago, our wounded had been removed to a near-by shelter and later to Tabor, where it was discovered that one of them was this same Saleebi in Saracen clothes.

"Before the Ameer had gone a word further, something whispered to me that the Saleebi was no other than your father, man-child. But lest my

suspicions should prove false, not a breath of what I had heard must reach you, until you had seen him for yourself. Then, as you know, I came that night to the hut, and heard from your lips the story I already knew. And to complete the proof — the rose that you took from your girdle!"

As the narrative proceeded, Robert Arnot would sometimes venture a question through Roland.

"How long was I at Tabor?" he asked now.

"Several months," Khaleel replied, "and for a long time it was thought that you could hardly live from one day to the next. When he finally recovered" — he turned to Roland and Samson — "he was like a little child, he had even to learn to walk, and his hair had become as you see it now."

"Why did they take care of him?" Roland inquired curiously. "He was a prisoner and their enemy!"

"He was not an enemy *then*," returned Khaleel; "he was helpless and in need; he became a guest! At first," he resumed, "there was some question of sending him back to the Saleebiyin, but months passed before he was strong enough and afterward the matter drifted. When our garrison at Tabor was moved to Kaukab-il-howa, your father came, too, as a matter of course, and here in this court," he concluded, "he has spent his days pacing back and forth, seldom resting, and never without a rose in his hand — just as I first saw him, and as you did, too, man-child!"

"That such things could be!" Samson murmured half to himself.

"Did you arrange it, Khaleel, that no one should be about when we first came?" Roland demanded.

"Yes, lest something should disturb that first meeting."

"And to think," Roland reflected, "how easily this might not have happened if you hadn't chanced to see him!"

"Ah, man-child," rejoined Khaleel gravely, "Allah's will has been from the beginning!"

Afterward there was a great deal for Roland to tell. His father must hear of the good Father Gaspard, and of his tireless devotion; of the gay Chevalier, even of Rasheed, and the incomparable Abou Kbeer; of the golden days on the Shephelah pressed down and running over with unforgettable happiness, of Khaleel's visits flashing in and out of them; above all and everything, of the beloved comradeship of Samson!

Throughout the long story Robert Arnot listened, sometimes laughing, sometimes grave, sometimes interrupting it to exclaim fondly, "Heaven be thanked, Roland, lad, you've not put to shame the name we gave you, your mother and I!" More than once he said, looking at Samson and Khaleel, "Tell them for me, little son, that I owe them a debt I can never pay" — and at last he added, in a moved way — "except by sharing you with them!"

In the end Roland spoke of his decision to enter

the service of the Crusades at once. Robert Arnot's face lighted with its old eager energy:

"There will be two of us to go, then — and need enough for us, Heaven knows!"

No sooner had his memory recovered itself than the will began to assert its own sturdy rule, and, Roland knew for himself that there was nothing to fear for it; its strength was unharmed, its vigor undulled.

"More need than ever before," he agreed, and, when Khaleel and Samson had left them alone for a little, he told his father of how matters stood with the Frankish armies.

"Not an hour for us to lose!" Robert Arnot declared; then his face softened and he said sorrowfully, "Would that my old comrade might have lived to welcome us, so that I might have thanked him in my way for my vast debt to him. But now that he's gone, all the more reason for us to fill his place, so why delay, little son, why not go at once?"

And Roland, with the frankness that had always been between himself and Khaleel, put the question to him.

"Of course! As soon as you will! And on my horses every step of the way, man-child!"

"To the edge of the Shephelah, just!" the boy protested affectionately. "From there on, afoot!"

Robert Arnot having wandered to the outer gate said he would wait there until they were ready to start; and meanwhile there was an enchanted hour

for Roland and Samson while Khaleel showed them the great castle.

No lack of soldiers in sight now, Roland observed: silent, vigilant figures, that kept watch from tower windows, or paced slowly back and forth on the broad walls; a squad at the gate, and another in the courtyard.

But, one and all, they took a lively interest in this unexpected turn in the fortunes of the white-haired Saleebi, and on every side Roland caught bits of their good-fellowship. And when Khaleel gave the word for a quick departure to satisfy the restless spirit of Robert Arnot, the walls of Kaukab-il-howa rang with the good wishes that were called out to the two Frangi.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

It was the Shephelah as Roland loved it best that welcomed them as they climbed out of the barren wadi; the Shephelah, warm with the flush of morning, playful and friendly, and pungently sweet. Here for two glad years they had been comrades, he and Samson and Khaleel, and here, too, they must part, each to go his own way. He almost faltered at the thought, and Samson, wrestling with his own sore heart, watched the boy's hard-fought battle with ever-comprehending eyes.

As they reached a place where the road forked, Khaleel drew rein, and the others dismounted. To the west lay the sea and the Crusader camps; to the south, over hill and valley, the hut, the sheep, Abou Kbeer.

For a moment Roland flung his arms around Il Howa's neck, and laid his cheek to the beautiful, intelligent face, and, as he stood so, Khaleel leaned forward in his saddle and took the fair head in his hands.

"Man-child, no longer child but man, ready for men's work, and for — this!" He lifted a sheathed sword from his side and laid it before the boy.

"It has a mate — only one — and that Saleem carries. Each bears the same inscription in our language, 'Brothers.' See for yourself."

There was a little expectant hush, as Roland, Khaleel's hand on his, drew the blade from its scabbard. Samson, slipping a finger along the bold beautiful characters, read the Arabic inscription aloud.

"Brothers," the boy translated for his father.

"All that the word means they've been to us," Robert Arnot cried out warmly — "yes, *taught* us!" Something welled up in him too strong and too tender to be spoken, something that swept away difference of language and creed, and that he, as yet, only dimly understood. "Heaven make me worthy," he said at last humbly, "to be counted as brother to such!"

"A pledge between us" — Khaleel bent over Roland again — "in war, in peace, to the end of our lives: Brothers!"

And before the boy could find his voice, the Saracen had turned Il Howa east, and was gone, a distant, flying figure with his little band of fleetly following horses.

Slowly Roland raised the blade where the sunlight flashed along its gleaming length. An exhilaration that was too intense to be either joy or pain possessed him, for in this moment of new-gained significance he had pledged himself to the world of men and of deeds in the name of a common brotherhood. Ah, he would be worthy of his sword and its mute message, in war, in peace, to the end of his life!

"Beloved little brother" — Samson drew very near, and Roland knew that, though there would be no word of parting, this was their last moment together — "I have always known that this must come, you to follow your Call, I, mine."

In a flash Roland went back to that day when he sat on the sands of Jaffa, spellbound at sight of the dark, beautiful face and its contradiction of smiling eyes and somber mouth. "Samson — Samson!" he burst out, choked with the flood of memory, "what if you hadn't come down that day! Why, Samson, not to have lived with you, not to have known the Shephelah — Syria —" He flung out his arms in a passion of love and farewell to the bright hills and all that they had held for him.

"Ah," Samson cried, "from the moment I saw you, little brother, I wanted to show you what I love best, and that is the heart of Syria. And because we know it, you and I, even as we know each other, I can let you go!"

A little later, as Roland and his father came out on a rise of ground, Roland turned to look back on the hills. There, as he had foreseen, was the lithe, powerful figure striding along, the abba streaming free. All at once it halted, and Roland knew that each of them had had the same thought: to catch that last glimpse of each other!

For a second of time they stood motionless, the three of them, and then there floated out to Roland and his father words that were hardly distinguish-

able until the hills caught them up and flung them wide: "Go in peace!" — Syria's universal farewell to the departing friend. Then, fainter and fainter, "Peace!" echoed the Shephelah. And now Samson turned, and once more swung resolutely on his way.

The next moment Roland faced squarely about, hand on sword, eyes searching out the nearest path that led to the plain. The bitterness of parting had somehow vanished in the sweetness of these magic words of brotherhood and of peace. The world seemed now a great family in which each followed his own Call while yet he strove toward a more perfect brotherhood. It was good to live in such a world, good to bear a part in it; good, above all, he said to himself, to answer the Call side by side with his father, and, shoulder to shoulder, to stand with him in the great Cause.

Robert Arnot sensing the boy's thoughts, caught his arm fondly. "Comrades, little son," he said, "for always, in the name of Christendom and the Cross!"

Roland assented gravely; then, as he raised his sword high, "In the name of Christendom and the Cross," he repeated, "and in the name of The Holy Land!"

THE END

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